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Baby Sam,

The Boy Giant of the Yellowstone;

OR,

Old Spokane Joe's Trust.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "HERCULES, THE DUMB DESTROYER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE PLEASURE PARTY.

FAR up on the borders of the Yellowstone Park, on the rugged breast of the grim old mountains, Mary's Lake lay sparkling like a jewel under a bright September sun—mirroring in its crystal depths the envying peaks that rose thousands of feet above it on all sides. Dotted with several little islands and indented with narrow tongues of land covered with the richest of foliage that was now all aglow with the soft autumnal tints, the lakelet and its surroundings presented as grand and romantic a picture as ever enraptured the human heart or filled the mind and soul with the majesty and power of the Creator.

A party of four persons, drawing rein on an eminence overlooking this lake, gazed in speechless wonder and admiration on the scene outspread before them. Two men and two women composed the party—all in the very prime of young man and womanhood.

The eldest of the four must have been about five-and-twenty years of age. He was a man a little above medium height, with a well-developed physique, a handsome, intelligent face, dark-blue eyes and heavy brown mustache. He sat his horse like a young cavalier, and no one looking upon Frank Rodman could have regarded him as

aught else than a gallant and manly young man. He was well-dressed and well-mounted, and carried a rifle and a pair of revolvers hung at his saddle-bow.

At Frank Rodman's side rode Miss Sarah Marshall, a blue-eyed, fair-faced girl of eighteen, whose ladylike bearing and vivacious spirit made her in every respect worthy of the attention of her gallant cavalier.

The third person, Frederick Sears, was a young man of two-and-twenty, strong and robust, with an intelligent face and pleasant address. Like Rodman, he was well-mounted and armed with rifle and revolvers.

At Sears's side rode Wilma Rodman, Frank's sister, who would have attracted more attention than any one of the four. She was, perhaps, seventeen years of age, with a form, while rather petite, possessed of all the graces of perfect womanhood, and a face of rare beauty

made radiant in its loveliness by its intellectual brightness and the peerless bearing of its possessor. Her eyes, shaded with long dark lashes, were of a dark brown, large and lustrous. Her rosy cheeks and dimpled chin had been touched with brown by exposure to sun and wind, but this served rather to lighten her beauty than to mar it.

These four young people were residents of the Gallatin valley, and were on their way for a trip through the Yellowstone Park, of whose wonders they had heard so much. Wilma Rodman had been the leading spirit in getting up the party. She so dearly loved the wild, romantic and rugged scenery of the mountains that she would give her brother Frank no rest nor peace until he had not only promised to take her to the Park, but had actually started on the trip.

They were well equipped for the journey, being provided with tents, cooking utensils and food, all of which were loaded upon the backs of four pack horses.

They had come in by the old Bozeman trail, and before leaving home it had been arranged that they go into camp at Mary's Lake for a day or two, or until they were joined there by a fifth person who was to be their guide during their stay in the Park. This person was none other than the noted Baby Sam, the Boy Giant of the Yellowstone; and when they came in sight of the lake, its presence sent a thrill through Wilma's breast that perhaps none of the others experienced—not that they were less enthusiastic or less capable of appreciating the scene—but because it was the appointed place of meeting with her big-hearted boy lover.

Besides the young mountaineer their number was to be further increased by a party of three men, on their arrival at the Yellowstone Lake. One of these was Wilma and Frank's father, who, with an old hunter named Spokane Joe, was assisting one Professor Drood, of the Government service, in making some geological researches in the wonderful val-



"ME? WELL, I'M PLAIN KA-RISTOPHER KO LUMBUS BANDY, AND—" "NOT OLD KIT BANDY, THE MOUNTAIN DETECTIVE?" EXCLAIMED SAM. "I SHOULD LAUGH TO SMILE THAT I AM THAT MAN."

ley; but of them we will speak more fully hereafter.

Mary's Lake was not over two miles away when it first burst upon the sight of the four happy young tourists, and their animals seeming to become imbued with their own eager and exuberant spirits quickened their pace and in a short time the western shore of the lake was reached.

To dismount, unpack and unsaddle their horses and tether them out to grass that grew luxuriantly hard by, occupied but a few short minutes, when the party sought the shade of a cluster of pines close by the lake and sat down to rest and enjoy the beauty and majesty of the scene outspread before them.

Baby Sam was to have met them there at noon that day, when he was to take them, in a canoe he had concealed somewhere along the west shore, to a lovely little island out some forty rods in the lake, there to spend the afternoon and the coming night. The Boy Giant had named it Wilma Isle, for he had often told her that it was the loveliest spot he had ever seen, being possessed of some strange and romantic sights and sounds.

It was just ten o'clock when they reached the lake, so they would not have long to wait should Baby Sam be on time.

"That," said Frank Rodman, pointing toward the nearest island in the lake, "must be Sam's Wilma Isle."

"I presume so," replied Wilma, her fair face aglow with expectancy and admiration; "and I'm quite anxious to visit the island. Sam says that after night the waves chasing the pebbly shore make a faint, weird, sweet music that fairly charms the soul."

"To him, I suppose, the music of the waves is like that of your voice," remarked Frank, "which accounts for the name of the island," whereupon he burst into a peal of rollicking laughter that was caught up by the wonderful echoes around them and sent dancing away into the mountains, like the laugh of a hundred satyrs.

"Oh, Frank!" quickly exclaimed Wilma, as the dying echoes suddenly filled her mind with a vague fear; "what if those bloodthirsty Sioux should dig up the hatchet again and raid over into the Yellowstone?"

"Such a thing is possible, though hardly probable. If they should strike anywhere, it would be at the settlements in the Gallatin and Upper Yellowstone. All a raid in the Park would benefit them wouldn't pay for the trouble."

"I've been inclined to think, Frank," said Fred Sears, "that the cattlemen over in the Yellowstone are really uneasy, for they've been talking of moving their herds into the Gallatin."

"Oh, the red-skins will steal cattle at any time, Fred, and for that reason I suppose the herders want to get further from them. Generals Custer and Reno are keeping a watch on old Sitting Bull, and the first break he makes you'll hear of some lively music. But, I'll tell you: I believe that outlaw, Scott Dresden, is at the head of half of all the devilment accredited to the Indians. If Sitting Bull, the old fool, would scalp him, he might not have any but his own sins to account for."

Thus the conversation ran on until the first thing they knew it was noon; but Baby Sam had not yet put in an appearance. Dinner was postponed an hour, but when one o'clock came the youth had not arrived, and so they ate their meal and waited on. One, two, three hours went by but they brought not the expected guide. Uneasiness now became plainly depicted upon the faces of the girls, and at length Wilma, unable to restrain her feelings longer, said:

"I am afraid something has happened him, Frank."

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" replied the brother, in his blunt, bluff way, "he'll be along, rest assured of that. Baby Sam's old enough, and I'm sure, big enough, to take care of himself. What does an hour or two, or a half-day for that matter, amount to? I didn't expect he would be here on time to the very minute."

"But he thought he would get here ahead of us."

"Suppose he did; he'll find out his—Hark! I'll bet that's Sam coming now."

The clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard coming down the valley, and springing to their feet the party ran to the edge of the grove and glanced up the pass down which they saw a horseman riding, at a sweeping gallop.

A cry of joy burst from their lips, for they saw it was Baby Sam, and stepping out into plain view the men swung their hats above their

heads and gave utterance to a shout. The Boy Giant answered them with a wave of his hand.

A minute later the youth had reached the lake, and springing from his saddle advanced and shook hands with his friends, saying:

"I am glad to see you all here, but am very sorry I have kept you waiting. How do you all do?—how long have you been here?—have a pleasant journey?"

"Quite pleasant, indeed," responded Frank Rodman, in his usual happy way; "been here since ten o'clock and all's well, and we are truly glad to see you, for some of our folks were getting a little restless."

"I am sorry, indeed," replied the young mountaineer, "but I'll explain the cause of my delay as soon as I put my horse out to grass."

To unsaddle his hard-riden animal and tether it out required but a few minutes, when he turned and rejoined his friends by the lake.

Samuel Burling, or as he was better known, Baby Sam, was a boy but nineteen years of age, and yet he stood fully five feet ten inches in height. He was powerfully built, with a well-knit frame, square shoulders, deep chest, and a large, well-shaped head set on an athlete's neck. His face was smooth and boyish, yet wore an expression indicative of force of character, courage and intelligence. His eyes were large and of a dark-gray color, his brow broad, and his mouth, though rather large, was well-shaped and the most expressive feature of the attractive face.

He was dressed in a neat-fitting suit made after the style so peculiar to the *ranchero* of the western plains. He was armed with a Winchester rifle, a large-sized revolver and a hunting-knife. Around his waist was a belt filled with rifle and revolver cartridges.

Most of this boy's life had been spent in the settlements of the Yellowstone and Gallatin valleys. When but twelve years old he was left an orphan in the care of a kind-hearted yet eccentric old bachelor uncle who divided his time between cattle-raising and hunting. The old man was very considerate of Sam's welfare, and being a person of a fair education, he took great pains in teaching Sam, who soon obtained an excellent knowledge of the usual English branches.

But the lad had always loved the mountains, and so became a hunter and trapper, and some years before Professor Hayden's formal exploration of the Yellowstone Park, Baby Sam had seen every object of wonder and interest in the valley in his ramblings after game. As a rifle and pistol-shot he had no equal in the valley, and as a cowboy he could handle the whip or lasso with consummate skill, and was, as well, a splendid and daring horseman. But the most remarkable thing about this Western lad was his physical strength. Not a man among all the stalwart residents in the Gallatin was a match for him, and it was this prodigious strength more than his stature that had given him the name of Boy Giant.

"Yes, I'm sorry I kept you waiting even an hour," repeated the young hill-haunter, "but the boys and I got into trouble over in the Yellowstone. You see, we'd concluded to drive our cattle over to the Gallatin, and had started, when we were attacked by about fifty Indians and outlaws—"

"Oh, dear! dear!" cried the maidens.

"Now, don't get excited, girls," the boy went on, "for remember all this occurred over one hundred miles from here; moreover, we frustrated the Indians' attempt to stampede our herd, and turned in and gave them a running fight for over half a day, and that is what kept me behind. In fact, had it not been for the speed and endurance of my horse I'd been a full day behind. As soon as we got the herd across the range, I left the boys and struck out for Mary's Lake. Now, I suppose the next thing is to get over to yonder island—Wilma Isle."

"Yes, we're all anxious, Sam," said Frank Rodman, "to hear your musical island give an evening concert."

"But, Sam," demurred Wilma, thoughtfully, "will it not be dangerous for us to venture into the valley if the Indians are making trouble?"

"I expect I was foolish saying anything about Indians," Baby Sam replied; "you'll not have a moment's enjoyment, Wilma, I'm afraid; but you need have no fears. I'll go and see if I can find the canoe I left over a year ago round yonder in a little cavern."

He hurried away, and while gone the young tourists made preparations for embarking to the island.

But few minutes had elapsed when Sam returned with his boat.

"It's a small affair, folks," he confessed, "and will not carry over three persons; and, as it's always the ladies first, I'll take Wilma and Sarah to the island the first trip, and you boys next."

To this there was no objection; so taking their seats in the canoe Sam pulled out into the placid waters of the lake and paddled carefully to Wilma Isle. Assisting them to land the young guide said, as he again took his seat in the boat:

"Now, while I'm after the boys, you girls can reconnoiter the island and see that there are no bears around," and with a laugh, he dipped the paddle and glided out from the island.

With a wave of her hand Wilma and Sarah turned and walked back among the dense pines that covered the little island, while a few vigorous strokes carried the Boy Giant back to where Frank and Fred were waiting.

"Pile in, boys," he ordered; "I'll run you over and then come back after our camp traps."

The two young men seated themselves in the boat, and the craft started on its return trip to the island; but it had gone less than ten rods when an exclamation burst from Fred Sears's lips, and pointing downward alongside the boat, he said:

"A floater, by smoke!"

Baby Sam backed water with his paddle and, gazing down at the object, beheld the lithe body of an Indian lying in the water—all but his face being submerged, and around that some aquatic grass was tangled. At a glance Sam saw that the Indian was alive, and recognized him as a young Crow, known as Sparrowhawk, a true and faithful friend of his and the settlers of the Gallatin.

"Good gracious, Sparrowhawk! what are you doing here?—what?"

The Indian shook his head, then said in broken English:

"Don't talk loud—*Sioux* hear you!"

"What do you mean, Sparrowhawk?"

"One, two—four—six *Sioux* warriors hid on island—no go there—git killed—scalped—Sparrowhawk come tell white friend quick he git way 'out *Sioux* see him."

"Can that be possible, Sam?" asked Frank Rodman.

"That Indian is as true as steel, Frank; I believe him."

"Great heavens! what will become of Wilma and Sarah?" asked Fred Sears.

"Yes—they git in trouble," declared the Indian.

"Sparrowhawk, where did you come from?" questioned Sam.

"From island—lay in water by rock—*Sioux* close by—no git away till girls come to island—then *Sioux* slip into thicket—then me swim away—me friend to pale-face—me Crow—*Sioux* kill me if catch—go back—quick—they kill you!"

"Sparrowhawk," began Baby Sam, but before he could finish the sentence a faint scream came to his ears from the island that told him the girls were in trouble—that the young Crow had told the truth.

"My God! what shall we do?" exclaimed Frank Rodman.

The situation was indeed a critical one. Quick decision and prompt action were now required, and dipping his paddle Baby Sam sent the boat back to the shore. As he did so the young Indian dove down into the water like a beaver, and disappeared from the sight of the trio:

Landing, Sam led the way back into the bushes out of sight of the island.

"Boys," he said, his voice and features betraying his inward emotions, "our coming to this place has been anticipated by those red devils. By some means or other they have learned that we were to be here. I tell you there's treachery at the bottom of it."

"No doubt of it, Sam, but who is the traitor?" queried Rodman.

"Ah, who, indeed?" responded the Boy Giant.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE DUEL.

"Boys," said Baby Sam, after a moment's silent reflection, "this is a terrible state of affairs—a sad ending, or, rather beginning, of what had promised so much pleasure and enjoyment to Wilma and Sarah. But something's got to be done; those girls *must* be rescued."

"Sam, what can we three do in the face of six or eight ambushed savages?" asked Frank Rodman.

"What can *we* do?" repeated the young giant, all the latent courage of his nature now fully aroused; "we can *die*, Frank. I now propose going straight to that island—alone if no one

cares to go with me, and fight the whole horde till I whip them or fail!"

"Ay, Sam! my heroic young friend, I will go with you!" declared Frank Rodman.

"I, too, Sam!" added Fred Sears.

"Boys," warned Sam; "weigh the matter well in your minds before you act. He who starts to yonder island takes his life in his hand. Every one of us may be riddled with bullets before we're ten rods from this shore."

"We will all die together then," was Frank's response.

"All right, boys; let's get ready," and Baby Sam examined his revolver, buckled his cartridge-belt around him and took up his rifle.

Frank and Fred were soon ready, and the three entered the canoe again. With the same steadiness of nerve and long, vigorous strokes that had marked his previous passage to the island, the Boy Giant plied the paddle.

Soon the island was reached without any demonstration from the foe, and in hopes of keeping the Indians in ignorance of their knowledge of the situation—the presence of the foe on the island—Baby Sam leaped ashore, and in a loud voice called out:

"Hullo, Wilma—Sarah! where are you, girls?"

There being no answer, the brave fellows, whose courage was now undergoing the crucial test, began whistling a sprightly lay—at the same time leading the way across the island. Near the center of the island they debouched into a little opening, which was half crossed when they were brought to a stand by a quick movement in the bushes before them.

Instantly the hands of the trio sought their revolvers. A sharp, wild yell, more like the bark of hyenas, broke the silence of the place, and the next instant eight savages burst from ambush with uplifted tomahawks and rushed upon the whites.

Quickly the revolvers of the latter rung out almost as one. A savage fell dead in his tracks; another stopped short, reeled backward and dropped in the edge of the shrubbery; while the third, dropping his tomahawk, sunk to his knees, clutching wildly at his breast. At the same time a fourth savage fell dead, *his head cloven by the tomahawk of a friend who, coming in wild haste behind, and endeavoring to throw his hatchet, caught it against a twig, thereby deflecting its course with fatal result to his brother brave.*

Simultaneous with the fall of the red-skins Frank Rodman and Fred Sears sunk down under the blows of flying hatchets, and the Boy Giant stood alone contending with the foe.

A brawny red-skin rushed forward and with scalping-knife in hand was bending over the prostrate form of Rodman when a lithe form—that of Sparrowhawk, the friendly Crow—leaped through the bushes, struck the savage a deadly blow, and then seized the form of young Rodman and dragged it into the thicket.

All this had occurred in almost a moment. At one blow, as it were, five of the red-skins and two of the whites had been stricken down, and the Boy Giant now stood alone, confronted by three powerful warriors. Before he could fire a second shot a flying tomahawk struck his revolver and knocking it from his hand carried it out of reach, thus leaving him empty-handed, to continue the struggle.

But, never flinching, he leaped at the red imps with clinched fists, his eyes fairly burning with their fierce glare and his features set with the rigidity of marble. Scarcely aware of what he was doing, he struck right and left in his frenzied might, and in a moment two of the remaining Sioux were down and the third one—he who had accidentally slain his comrade—turned to flee.

But at this very instant, when victory seemed within the grasp of the young giant, a white man—a confederate of the savages, who had hitherto kept concealed in the bushes—dashed from his covert and running up struck the young athlete on the head from behind with a club that brought him to his knees, half stunned, and before he could recover, three more white men rushed from the bushes and grasping him bore him to the ground. A desperate struggle now ensued, in which the young giant gave the villains a hard fight, but the odds were too great for even his marvelous strength, and, finally overpowered, he was securely bound.

When he was permitted to rise to his feet and look around him, a sight met his gaze that would have dispelled all hope from the breast of one less resolute and courageous than Baby Sam. His young friend, Sears, lay dead among the savages. Rodman was gone, but whether living or dead he knew not. He had seen him fall and he had seen Sparrowhawk drag him

away. Before him stood three living savages and four white men. The latter he knew were outlaws, for among them he recognized the notorious Scott Dresden—an outlaw leader whose security had been guaranteed within the village of Sitting Bull in view of his services against the white settlers in the Yellowstone and Gallatin valleys.

Wilma and Sarah could not be seen or heard, and the boy felt satisfied that they had been spirited away from the island.

The surviving savages became furious over the death of their friends, and it was as much as the outlaws could do to restrain them from slaying the youthful Hercules. Among the warriors was one whose voice told that he was a white man arrayed in the paint and paraphernalia of a Sioux. He was tall and angular, with long arms, a sharp face, a peculiar-shaped head, enormous mouth, large ears, and small gray eyes, overhanging shaggy brows. He seemed even more vindictive toward the prisoner than did his friends, but as he was the man who had accidentally slain his comrade at the beginning of the conflict, it was probable that that mishap had something to do with his fury, for, not knowing but his surviving friends had witnessed his fatal blunder, he was endeavoring to maintain his standing as a warrior by boasting and forced expressions of resentment.

"Waugh!" he exclaimed, as he brandished his scalping-knife before the face of the prisoner, "Big Horn, the Sure Shot, is thirsting for the gore of the pale-face! He would scalp him alive and then roast him in fire like a dog! Waugh! let me at him!"

"Stand back, Big Horn!" commanded Scott Dresden, the outlaw chief; "I want to save that fellow. I've use for him."

"Ugh!" grunted Big Horn, with a vicious snap of the eyes; "if you want to save him you'd better tie me up—I'm mad—I'm wild, ferocious! The Great Spirit has let me loose. The pale-faces are my enemies. They invade our huntin'-grounds and slay our braves. Waugh! the spirits of forty-seven dead warriors are surging in my breast, pantin' for the gore of that big prisoner. To shake the scalp of the Boy Giant of the Yallerstun under the nose of the great Sittin' Bull would land me in the breech-clout and head-gear of a great and mighty war-chief."

"You're a mighty fool of an Indian now," retorted Scott Dresden; "you slop over wonderfully in the presence of a helpless foe."

"My Indian blood's fermenting, Captain Dresden," replied the renegade, evidently nettled by the stinging sarcasm of the outlaw, "and don't you forget to disremember that I'm the crack pistol-shot of the far Nor'west."

"You can claim that honor now, since Baby Sam is off duty, but if my memory serves me right he *had* the reputation of being boss of the revolver in this country."

"I deny it, captain, and challenge you to prove it now while you can. I say that I am, and have been the prince of the pistol, and dare you to prove the contrary. Now then, ye want to come to the scratch or gig like a man. I am ready to prove my claim in any way you may elect. I'm sure that's fair as a summer sky."

"All right; you'll stand to that, will you?" responded Dresden, with a sinister light in his eyes.

"I generally do what I say I will," declared Big Horn; "I'm no crawfish or chicken-gizzard."

"Then I suggest that each of you take a revolver, and, at fifty paces apart, turn your backs to each other, and at the word 'three,' turn and advance, firing as you go and when you please."

"That'd be a reg'ler duel," exclaimed Big Horn, in apparent surprise.

"I know it, but the best shot'd win. If you're what you claim you are, you'll run no risk; but if Baby Samuel gits in his work on you, why he'll be permitted to go free. This, now, is the way I elect, and you can come to the scratch now, or gig."

"I tell ye I never go back on my word," averred Big Horn, boastfully; "but then, it'll be too bad to let that big Ingin-shooter go free if he plugs me. He's the wust enemy we Sioux have got."

"Then you want to drop him, and if you're the superb shot you claim to be, you do the Sioux a favor as well as prove your claim."

"All right; I'm ready for blood. Yoop-pee! I'm the big Ingin from 'way, 'way over!" howled the renegade; and while he was thus parading himself, Scott Dresden took two of his men aside and said to them:

"I'm beginning to think that we need that renegade out of the way as bad as the *Indians* want Baby Sam removed. I believe he is a treacherous old scamp, who has wormed himself into the confidence of old Sitting Bull. I have been led to this conclusion by his presence here. He was not selected as one of the party for this expedition, but, somehow or other, by eavesdropping, I suppose—he has got wind of it and forced himself upon us. I'll swear, if we'd got here during the fight I'd have dropped him accidentally."

"It isn't too late yet, captain," suggested one of the outlaws.

"Yes; them Indians 'd report us to Sitting Bull, and then we'd be out our best friend. No, I think the best plan is to let him and Baby Sam settle the question as to their marksmanship—for which I care nothing on earth—and in doing so I think they'll settle each other, for both are undoubtedly fine shots."

"But, suppose the big boy refuses to fight?"

"No danger of that on the terms I offered. Of course, if I thought he'd escape being killed, I'd withdraw that offer; but I have no fears but they'll finish each other. However, we can see what can be done, and that at once."

Meanwhile the renegade kept up his wild boastings in the presence of the captive, and finally he stole up to him glaring him squarely in the eyes, with his knife raised as if to strike. But Sam never flinched, and like a cat stealing upon a bird the villain crept closer and closer until his sharp nose almost touched the boy's cheek, and in a low tone he hissed some words in the prisoner's ear that caused the youth to start as though it were the hiss of a serpent. Then, with a wild yell, the old renegade leaped backward, brandishing his knife before the prisoner's face and grinned like a snarling wolf.

"Say, let this monkey work stop," commanded Dresden as he came back; "Baby Sam, what do you say; will you fight that fool, Big Horn, on the terms I have stated?"

"Yes; if you give me my own revolver," responded the Boy Giant.

"All right, you shall have it. Let us retire to the beach."

The prisoner was conducted across the island to the east side, where lay a long, level stretch of sandy beach fully four rods in width, and as they passed along Sam saw where something had been dragged from the grove to the water's edge. He knew at once it had been a canoe, in which Wilma and Sarah had doubtless been removed from the island. The duelists were stationed near the water's edge, fifty paces apart, with backs turned upon each other. Baby Sam's left hand was fastened at his back and his feet so tied together that he could take but a short step. The outlaws would not trust him with too much liberty. His own revolver was given him, the empty chambers being all refilled from his cartridge-belt. An outlaw remained with him as a second. Another stood near the renegade, while Dresden and the others paused at the edge of the grove, about half-way between.

A resolute look was upon the face of the Boy Giant as he cocked his revolver and stood awaiting the signal to act.

"Ready!" suddenly rung out the voice of Dresden.

The combatants started and every nerve in their bodies seemed called into action.

"One," counted Dresden, and the eyes of the Boy Giant flashed like a startled buck's.

"Two." The youth's head turned slightly.

"Three."

The word was but cleverly out of the outlaw's mouth ere the duelists spun round upon their heels, and, as they did so their revolvers rung out as one, but instead of the principals, *the two seconds fell dead!* And before Dresden and his companions could realize the terrible situation, the weapons of the two deadly pistol-shots spoke again, and an outlaw and savage fell lifeless at the side of the outlaw chief!

With a cry of baffled triumph Dresden and his surviving friend turned and fled for their lives into the grove, leaving the two strange duelists, the renegade and the Boy Giant, standing alone and unharmed on the field of honor!

CHAPTER III. OLD KIT.

THE moment that Baby Sam saw his enemies disappear in the grove with affright, he turned and began hobbling toward the renegade, Big Horn, who also advanced until they met—his face convulsed with silent laughter.

Whipping out the knife he had flourished but

a few minutes before in the face of the boy, the man severed the youth's bonds, and then said:

"Now let's git to cover, lad, or them other fellers may take a hand in this shootin' matinee."

Sam followed the renegade into the bushes, where the latter turned, and putting out his big bony hand, said:

"Put her thar, Baby Samuel!" and the two palms came together with a sharp smack. "Ha, ha, ha, boy! It's a tie atween the two great pistol-shots o' the North! Great horn of Joshua! did you ever see a nicer job set up on the children of Satan? Did ye ever see a duel worked off in sich a bang-up style? You thought I war jokin' when I fu'st whispered to you thar, in the glade, didn't ye? Lordy! don't I make a savory, buxom Ingin, though! Can't I put on the variations and curlicues with frills in front and gores up the side! Didn't I split that Ingin's gourd accidentally a-purpose in a real Mosaic style! Say, lad, I know you're a fine shot, a brave boy, and all that, but if you'd run with me awhile, you'd soon be a double-breasted roarer from Roarerville."

"Well, who in the plague are you, anyhow?" demanded Sam, as soon as able to get in a word, for the man's action, and talk, and the faithful manner in which he had carried out the whispered promise made in the grove, puzzled him most completely.

Looking carefully around him as if to be assured that no one was near, he said:

"I reckon them survivin' fellows will pike out for a place less malarious, for this is a sickly island; but, oh! horn of Joshua! I'll be marked for red-skin vengeance forthwith and forever, amen! I'd liked o' have saved them two gals, boy, but situated as I was I could do nothin', and so they were hurried away from the island in charge of two big bucks that kept the island between you and them so's you couldn't see 'em. They're to be taken to the Ingin village, and mebbey you and me can catch 'em before they git there."

"But say," interrupted Sam, "who are you?"

"Me? Well, I'm plain Ka-ristopher Ko-lumbus Bandy, and—"

"Not Old Kit Bandy, the Mountain Detective?" exclaimed the amazed Sam.

"I should laugh to smile that I am that man—ay, I am more than that! I am a refugee from the turmoils and sorrows of domestic infelicity. With this paint off my face, and these Ingin habiliments somewhat reversed, you'd see a poor, haggard, heart-broken, downcast, storm battered-lookin' old relic of a once gay and festive gambolier. But marryin', boy—marryin's done the destructive work for me! My wife, Sabina Bandy, I hold responsible for the old, blistered, cadaverous, reel-footed hulk you see drifted afore you. She war a devoted wife—an affectionate helpmeet, but she allers kissed me at a distance—said distance lent enchantment. Do you see that scar there? Well, her proxy, an iron skillet, kissed me there; and there's whar the carvin'-knife, flipped from the ends o' her pink-nailed fingers, embraced me; and there—right there, Sammy, 's whar I war osculated with a sad-iron. This sunflower here's not a birth-mark, Samuel; oh, no! it's whar 'Bina love-branded me with a red-hot shovel. Oh! I'm a total wreck—I'm the ruins o' Babylon—the downfall of the Roman Empire—the destruction o' Herculaneum! That's why I'm a refugee—why I took to the timber—the mountains—the Ingin village. I'm here for peace, rest, safety. I war baptized into the Si-ox faith, but I'll be rimracked if I could stand it to see you deestroyed in the bloom o' youth—the mornin' twilight o' manhood."

"Mr. Bandy," said Baby Sam, in a grateful voice, "I thank you for your kindness in helping me out of my difficulty, but I must confess you're a badly mixed-up man, and still worser banged-up. Between your wife and the Ingins and outlaws, I'm thinkin' you'll have to emigrate now to Japan."

"Ja-thunder! boy, I intend to die on American soil that has been so gorgeously enriched with my blood—blood that's come down from Noah and the ark in all its primal purity. Boy, you needn't be afraid to trust me, though you needn't believe everything I say 'less you want to. My tongue's a kind o' an independent ranger and rambles away sometimes on its own hook while my mind's off prospectin' somewhar else. That comes through force o' habit—makin' excuses to one's wife while thinkin' o' some place to dodge; but I'm gittin' over 'em now—ar'n't one-half so bad as I used to be. But now, Baby, you know who and what I am, and I'm ready

for work. What shall it be fu'st? Just proclaim, boy, what it shall be, and you'll find me your twin-brother till death do us part."

"If I knew," said the young mountaineer, "what brought you Indians and the outlaws to this island, I could determine then what to do first."

"Boy, I can tell ye what I know 'bout it. Captain Dresden, you know, stays in the Ingin village, and I've been makin' it a p'int to watch him closely, and by a little systematic eaves-droppin' I learned that a select party of redskins, with a reserve of outlaws led by Dresden himself, war to visit this island, but for what purpose I couldn't learn. But I knew it was for nothin' good, so I made up my mind that I'd go on a little expedition o' my own, and so I pulled out for this lake and got here ahead o' the others. When they found I war here they couldn't do any better than to take me into their party. They told me some white squaws would come there soon, and that we'd git the scalp of the Boy Giant. This tickled me so that I couldn't hardly hold in. What follered you already know, and had I been able to get ashore I'd 'a' warned you of the ambush. Now my honest opinion is that this expedition war made here in the interest of Scott Dresden, or a friend o' his that's been hangin' round the village some months. And if that be the case, then thar's some one in the settlement of the Gallatin that posted Dresden in even the details of your trip to this place."

"Yes, that's very plain to be seen, Bandy," responded the boy, "but I can't think who the traitor can be. But say, my handsome red-skin, it'll pay you and me both to see that those other fellows don't escape alive from this island."

"Verily you speak the truth; your head's level as the calm, blue ocean. I know it'll be healthier for me if all the witnesses to our duel are tunneled with lead, so let's hunt the rascals down."

"Come on!" cried Baby Sam, grasping his revolver.

"That sounds heroic—'come on!'—noble words! I'm better on a follow than a lead, when the danger's in front. To follow you is protection, for you're broad and deep enough, boy, to stop a six-pound cannon-ball. Yes, I'll follow, for I want to show ye some o' my fightin' qualities—that I'm a hull litter o' wild-cats, a flock o' bald-eagles—a mule team with a brindle pup thrown in—a Jersey bull with a curl in the forehead. But look sharp, lad, that the varmints don't git the drop on your barn side."

With noiseless celerity the Boy Giant glided away through the bushes, his form slightly inclined forward, and his big eyes on the watch like those of a deer that scented danger. And the eccentric Kit Bandy moved along—not behind, but at his side, with all the silence and suppleness of one accustomed to the dangers of the trail.

Thus the two searched the grove, but finding nothing of the foe they made the circuit of the island, and, to their regret, discovered where Dresden and his two friends had escaped in a boat.

"Horn of Joshua!" exclaimed Bandy, regretfully; "I'm to blame for their escape. I stood down thar and cackled like an old fool when I'd ought to been at work. But that's the trouble with me, Baby—too much lip! I'm a splendid fighter, feeder, and a sound sleeper, but when this old mouth gits set a-goin' it makes a 'farnal fool o' me. But what now, Baby Samuel?"

"I must look about for my friend, who fell in the fight," the young mountaineer said, his voice full of sadness.

They proceeded to the little opening wherein the lifeless form of poor Fred Sears lay, but nowhere could Frank Rodman be found. They followed the trail where he had been dragged through the bushes to the water's edge by Sparrowhawk; but what disposition the young Crow had made of the body they could not imagine, unless he had consigned it to the waves. But why the Indian himself had disappeared was another query in their minds which they could not answer on any other grounds than that he had become cognizant of Baby Sam's capture, and fled before he had learned the result of the singular duel.

Sam and the old mountain detective hollowed out a grave with their knives and hands, and, with heavy hearts, placed the body of Fred Sears therein, and carefully covered it over with dirt and stones. Then the bodies of the savages and outlaws were consigned to the lake, and preparations made to depart from the ill-fated island.

To his great joy, the young giant not only recovered his revolvers, but his trusty Winchester and cartridge-belt. The two latter had been taken possession of, when the lad was captured, by an Indian, who had carefully set them aside when he went out to witness the duel in which he himself had fallen.

Crossing over to the west side of the lake, another bitter surprise awaited Sam. His and the tourists' horses had all been stolen along with all the most valuable part of their camp outfit, and the trail left behind told that the thieves had taken a southeasterly route around the lake.

The boy guide regarded this loss with philosophical coolness, but instead of following the horse-tracks he started off around the lake in search of the trail of Wilma's and Sarah's abductors. They had no difficulty in finding where they had landed, nor in determining the course they had taken after leaving the lake. It led away through a defile descending gradually toward the Yellowstone valley and touching the river near the lower extremity of the Yellowstone Lake. This left no doubt in the minds of the two scouts as to the destination of the abductors, and so they at once started in pursuit. They did not keep their eyes upon the trail as they would have done had they been on the open plain, for they knew the foe would follow one straight course to the river, at least. And being satisfied the Indians would not be expecting pursuit, unless Dresden and his friends had overtaken them and informed them of the outcome of the fight, the pursuers had high hopes of overhauling them before even they had made half the distance to the river.

Before they were scarcely aware of the fact, however, so eager were they on the trail, night was upon them, and as the darkness in the pass was almost impenetrable, they were compelled to stop and wait the coming of daylight.

To Sam it was the longest night he ever experienced. He did not close an eye in sleep, for the sweet face of Wilma was ever in his mind, and the fate to which she was being carried filled his breast with a restless fear.

With the first streaks of dawn they were up and away through the dewy shadows of the densely-wooded pass. They had gone supperless and went on without breakfast, for they had no food, nor did they like to lose time to procure it. But as the hours went by and noon approached, Old Kit, whose strength the boy was taxing to its utmost, said:

"Boy, I observe that the waste of caloric is producin' a sort o' a goneeness in my stomach. I'm considered a good traveler, but I'll be blest if I can hold my own with you without refreshments, once in a while. Say, isn't it 'bout time to dine? I'll swear, by the horn of Joshua! that I could eat a grizzly bear."

"I presume we'd better be looking out for some game for food," said Baby Sam, "for I'm beginning to feel a gnawing at the stomach, too."

Before they had gone a mile further a young deer came out from the shadows on the right and stopped and looked at them a moment, then bounded away down the valley. But before it had gone three rods the rifle of the Boy Giant rung out, and the fawn sunk down dead.

Old Kit advanced, and securing a quarter of the deer, carried it to a little spring where they halted. A fire was kindled, and in a few minutes the aroma of broiling venison was mingled with the odor of the pine woods, making the appetite of the two all the keener.

After having partaken of a hearty meal, a few slices of meat were broiled for future need, and then they were ready to resume their tramp. But before they had started, Old Kit happened to glance up the acclivity on their right, when he started back, crying out in sudden alarm:

"God in Israel. Look thar, Baby Sam!"

The Boy Giant glanced in the direction indicated when he, too, uttered an exclamation of horror, his form became motionless and his gaze transfixed at the sight that he beheld. It was that of a huge, glossy panther dragging a human body along a narrow ledge fifty feet above them, and a single glimpse of the white face of the animal's prey told him that it was the lifeless body of his sweetheart, Wilma Rodman!

CHAPTER IV.

IN CAMP ON THE YELLOWSTONE LAKE.

ON the shores of the Yellowstone Lake—under the sheltering branches of stately pines, three men were encamped one bright September day. The spot selected was one that commanded a fair view of the lake and its surroundings, and revealed to eye and ear the

romantic beauty and grandeur of the place. It was at a time, too, when the autumnal hues of lilac and gold tinted the landscape and touched into a richer beauty the wonders of Wonderland.

Two of the three men were bordermen; their dress and general appearance were evidence of this fact. The eldest was a man of fifty years—of rather small proportions, with a keen, gray eye, a bearded face, and a prominent nose that was truly indicative of the Roman courage of Old Spokane Joe, the hunter, trapper and guide. He was dressed in a full suit of buckskin, and carried a revolver and hunting-knife in his belt.

The second man was Henry Rodman, a settler of the Gallatin valley, and the father of Frank and Wilma, between whom and Old Spokane Joe there existed a fellowship warm and devoted as though bound by the ties of blood—a fellowship and attachment at which those who knew not the secret of their bond of union often marveled. In general appearance Mr. Rodman was a tall, finely-proportioned man, with an intelligent face and a pleasant, affable disposition.

The third man was Professor Anson Drood, a special agent of the Government, sent out by the Secretary of the Interior, to make some further geological researches in the great Park. Being a former friend of Henry Rodman's in the East, he sought out his old acquaintance in the Gallatin, and through him secured the services of Old Spokane as a guide, as well as Mr. Rodman as a companion.

At the time we introduce these three men they had been in camp there since the previous day, and it was their intention to remain a day or two longer, or, at least, until Baby Sam, Frank and Wilma Rodman, Fred Sears and Sarah Marshall had joined them, as had been arranged between the two parties some two weeks previous—the time at which the exploring party had left the settlement.

Old Spokane had been in the Park many times before, but to Henry Rodman and Professor Drood the scene was new and far beyond their conception of romantic grandeur. Standing by the lake they could see the cold, gray mountain peaks that pierced the sky reflected in the azure depths of the water. They could see scores of little islands that seemed bursting with vegetation scattered over the bosom of the placid sheet. They could see thousands of aquatic fowls flocking the silvery surface of the water, or winging their way along the shores. They could see the snow-white steam from the boiling springs along close to the lake's rim, rising between them and the sun, whose reflected rays arched each vapory column with a beautiful rainbow. They could faintly hear the rumble of the great geysers in the distance, and all the while these sights and sounds were enjoyed in an atmosphere that seemed pervaded with a sweet, intoxicating quality, that conspired to make the place a land of enchantment.

"I'll declare," said Professor Drood for the twentieth time, perhaps, as he gazed around him, "this is certainly the most wonderful spot on God's earth. Eden's garden could not have been more lovely, even with the serpent left out. It's strange, indeed, that the Indians prefer the cold, cheerless shadows of the mountain defiles for their villages to this lovely valley, where sunshine, fish and game are so abundant."

"It's superstition, professor," answered Old Spokane Joe, the guide, "that keeps the red varlets from defiling this valley with their dirty wigwams and lousy dogs and papposes, though huntin'-parties often come in and hunt for days. Them b'ilin' springs and roarin' pantin' geysers, their traditions say, are the escape-holes o' the wrath o' the Evil Spirit, and so they have no desire to live within the sound o' his Satanic Majesty's voice."

"It's a good thing for the Park they think so," thought the geologist; "but I do wish we had a canoe here. I should like to visit yonder little islands that seem bursting, like cotton-pods, with the fullness of their vegetation. But I say, Henry, take this glass, examine that little island away off yonder, and tell me what you see."

Mr. Rodman took the glass, and after carefully scanning the island for several minutes, he exclaimed:

"By St. Peter! Anson, I see what appears to be the roof of a cabin among the bushes on that island."

"That was exactly what I saw," declared Drood.

"It may be," observed Old Spokane, and he, too, took the glass; "ye see I hav'n't been in this Park for three years come next June; howsoever, I've heard that mysterious little sail-

boats hev been seen skippin' 'round over the lake like specters in the moonlight, and that the reports of rifles hev been heard ringin' through the Park, but no rifleman could be found; but say, folks, by the eternal—"

His speech was here interrupted by the sound of footsteps, and turning, the three men found themselves face to face with a stranger who had approached unseen.

The new-comer was a man of perhaps five-and-forty years of age a little above the medium height, with a cold, steel-gray eye that flashed quick and furtive glances around. His hair was closely cropped, but his face was covered with a long, full beard that had faded in the sun to a dirty reddish color. He was dressed in the blue shirt, gray pants, high-topped boots and slouched hat of a miner. He wore a heavy belt in which hung a revolver and knife. He gave his name as Donald Strahm, and his business as a mining prospector.

At the sound of his voice Old Spokane Joe started, for in it was a familiarity that recalled a voice of long ago. He glanced at the miner's face and form, and even there he saw something vaguely in harmony with the voice. But the man's name and the man's calling finally convinced him that he was mistaken, and that the familiar tone was simply a coincidence—one of those often occurring in the life of a person in which the sound of a voice, or the sight of an object, recalls some familiar face or scene that has lain dormant in memory's casket for years.

"Well, Mr. Strahm," said the professor, after a general introduction, "I am glad to have met you, and hope you can report success in your prospecting."

"I regret to say that I can make no such report, professor," Strahm replied, with an air of disappointment and disgust. "This Wonderland is a most gigantic fraud. All's not gold that glitters here, by any means. Nature expended so lavishly on her majestic mountains, yawning canyons, grand waterfalls, stupendous geysers, and wonderful scenery, that she had to embellish with the cheapest of jewelry. There isn't an ounce of gold or silver in all this boasted Park, but when it comes to sulphur-beds, volcanic glass, cheap petrifications, rainbows, hot mud and boiling water, it'll take the rag off the bush the wide world over. You see, gentlemen, there's no romance in my composition, consequently I can't live on warm water and rainbows, and I am now fully prepared to denounce the Yellowstone Park as a more gigantic fraud than the Garden of Eden ever was."

Although the three men did not share the miner's opinion of the Park, they could not help laughing at his indignation and disgust.

"You are not here in the Park alone, are you, Mr. Strahm?" Professor Drood finally asked.

"No, sir," he replied; "I left a friend in the mountains about ten miles from here, and he's absolutely sick at heart, head and stomach of this Fraudland. I think this will be our last day here, for you see we're not here for health, but wealth. But, gentlemen, as it is getting late, I will have to leave you, with my best wishes."

"Can't you remain overnight with us, Mr. Strahm?" Henry Rodman asked.

"No, thank you, I promised my friend I'd be back, and I'm afraid he'll commit suicide if I don't keep my word. He's a badly broke-up miner, and's been threatening to spoil a geyser by throwing himself into the crater. Again wishing you a pleasant sojourn in Fraudland, gentlemen, I bid you good-evening!"

With this, Donald Strahm took his departure, and Henry Rodman noticed that Old Spokane Joe watched his retreating figure with knitted brows and compressed lips, like one absorbed in deep mental reflection.

"What do you think of him, anyhow, Spoky?" the settler finally queried.

"Oh!" exclaimed the guide, with a sudden start, "I reckon he's all right; but he's terrible sick o' this kentry."

"He pretended to be," said Professor Drood, "but he acted to me a good deal like a fellow telling a lie, and as I claim to be a judge of human nature, I think you'll find I'm not far from correct. Ten to one he has struck it rich, and is uneasy for fear we may, in some way, run in on him."

"Say, folks," suddenly called out Old Spokane, as he glanced out over the lake, "whar's that island with the hut on't gone? I'll swar I don't see it, and I war jist goin' to remark when Strahm come up that the island war movin'."

To the surprise and astonishment of Drood

and Rodman they saw that the island had really disappeared from where they had first seen it, nor could it be seen anywhere upon the lake.

"By heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Rodman, "that's queer. I don't understand it, professor. Surely, floating islands can't form a part and parcel of the wonders of Wonderland?"

"It really looks as though they did, Henry," responded Drood.

"May a grizzly hug me, if I ever heard o' sich a thing before!" declared Old Spokane. "Reckon it couldn't 'a' been a phantom island, eh, men?" and the old hunter broke into a low chuckle that was not entirely the spirit of mirth.

"It's something that must be inquired into," decided the professor. "Ah! look off there, men, and you'll see our floating island, sure enough, moving with the wind toward the western shore."

True enough; with the aid of the glass, they saw the little island floating out from among a cluster of fixed islands, and moving slowly westward. They could see the comb of the cabin upon it, and as they stood regarding it in silent amazement, Old Spokane remarked:

"Men, I'm goin' to make a reconnoissance 'round that way and look into that thing. Mr. Rodman, I'd like to speak with you a moment, before I go, please. Professor, excuse us."

"Certainly," replied Drood, as he continued watching the floating island.

Rodman followed Old Spokane out into the bushes. The latter seemed a little restless and uneasy.

"Henry," he said, in a low tone, "I'm a little troubled."

"What about, Joe?"

"That man Strahm."

"In what respect?"

"I solemnly believe he is Norton Fenwick."

"What?" and it was Rodman's turn now to betray uneasiness; "not the man who left the child in your care?"

"The very same. I thought I recognized his voice the moment he spoke, although it's been nigh onto fourteen years since I see'd him—since he came to our cabin and gave into my and my wife's care that little lump o' humanity that has since made *your* life so bright, Mr. Rodman. My Lord, Henry! if it is so, we can't give up our idol now, can we?"

"No, no, Spokane, never; but if that was Fenwick, I feel sure he did not recognize you. If he did, however, and played ignorance, then he has got a clew and is following you up. You know the professor said he believed the fellow was lying. But that floating island may throw some further light on the matter."

"That's what I thought," returned Spokane; "so, if you'll look after our hosses if I don't git back afore dark, I'll be off."

"All right, Spokane, all right."

The old guide moved rapidly away, and Rodman went out to see about their horses, for evening was fast approaching.

Keeping well under cover of the dense pine timber, Spokane hurried along the lake. He had proceeded nearly three miles when he concluded he must be nearing the vicinity of the island, and so turned and moved cautiously toward the lake.

He had gone but a few paces, however, when a voice hailed him from behind, and turning quickly he found himself face to face with the miner, Donald Strahm, who appeared from a cluster of bushes in which the quick eye of the old hunter caught sight of several men, most of whom were Indian warriors!

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIOUS BENRAYMOND.

ADVANCING toward Spokane Joe, Donald Strahm extended his hand, saying:

"Ah! we meet again! Good-evening, Jack Prunty."

Spokane started at the mention of that name, but quickly recovering his presence of mind, responded:

"Why d'ye call me that, stranger?"

"Don't you know me, Jack?" Strahm asked, in apparent surprise.

"No," replied the hunter, though he evaded the truth, fully satisfied now, by the man's looks and the presence of his concealed friends, that Strahm had confronted him with mischief in his heart.

"Then," said the pretended miner, "I will tell you who I am; I am Norton Fenwick, the father of the babe I intrusted to your and your wife's care years ago when you resided on the Platte in

Nebraska. Do you know me now? Can you tell me why you ran away with my child, and assumed the name you now bear?"

"Your child? You did not tell us it was your child when you gave it into our care!" replied the hunter, in a firm, decided tone.

"I tell you so now, and isn't that enough? You proved recreant to your trust, Jack Prunty—you and your wife—"

"Have a care!" exclaimed Old Spokane, fiercely, as he dropped his rifle into the hollow of his left arm; "my wife is dead, sir, and no man shall speak evil of her and live long."

"And my child—is she dead, too?" demanded Strahm.

"For all I know."

"I don't believe you." He could afford to talk so, with half a dozen friends close at hand.

"Then seek your information elsewhere," retorted Spokane.

"I have been seeking it elsewhere for two years, at great cost and privations, Jack Prunty. I learned that you had not been murdered by the savages—that you'd escaped with my child, and I have been hunting you. Here I find you under an assumed name; but where's my child that you agreed to keep for me, and to deliver up whenever I called and paid her keeping? Now, Jack Prunty, I am no miner—"

"Never believed you war," interrupted Old Spokane.

"And I am here," the man went on, without heeding the interruption, "after my child."

"Well, you'll have to go away without her."

"Do you know where she is?"

"If I did I wouldn't tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because I never believed she was your child. I always *did* think, and do yet, that she was the victim of somebody's cussedness."

"What's that to you so you get your pay?"

"I have human feelin' and don't keer a cuss for all the wealth in the land."

"But what of your honor? You made a fair agreement with me."

"That's run out by statute of limitation. Ten years in Nebraska outlaws all verbal agreements—written ones, too."

"Jack Prunty, stop your trifling!" Strahm cried, in sudden rage; "you shall not rob me of my child with impunity!"

"Ah! you threaten me, then?"

"I will have my child or your life-blood. I will put you on the rack and torture the secret out of you!"

"Don't forget," and Old Spokane's eyes flashed with a fire of resentment and indignation, "that you're treadin' on dangerous ground. I'm no coward to be skeered by you and your ambushed minions there in the brush!"

"Then you still refuse to tell me where my child is?"

"I do!"

Strahm turned and uttered a low whistle. In answer thereto, nearly half a score of Indians and white men emerged from the thicket.

Old Spokane saw that he had got to fight for his life, and that, too, against fearful odds, but he was not the man to flinch. Instantly he passed a mental resolution to die rather than yield the secret the villain sought, and thereby add to the life of one he loved—yes, worshiped with all the devotion of the human heart—misery and suffering.

By this time the sun had sunk behind the main range of the mountains, and shadows were gathering. Back of the old hunter was a deep, dense border of undergrowth running along the lake shore. In this he might have dodged the foe, and, aided by the gathering twilight, have escaped unharmed, but his manhood, honor, and the happiness of others seemed to depend upon his facing his enemy there, and had the ruffians numbered a score he would as resolutely have maintained his convictions of right and duty by facing them all unto death.

"You see," said Strahm, as his band came out and aligned themselves before the hunter, "that I am not alone, so you'd better surrender gracefully."

"Back, scoundrels!" yelled Old Spokane, fiercely, a deadly light gleaming in his eyes; "the first one that crowds on—"

He did not finish the sentence, for a savage, half-crouching, darted toward him like a panther; but the old man, accustomed to quick work with the rifle, threw the muzzle of his weapon around, and without an aim sent a bullet crashing into the top of the red-skin's head.

A wild yell burst from the lips of the others; and they made a rush in a body for the hunter, but, clubbing his rifle, the old man swung it about him like a whip of iron, knocking the

foremost of the foe heels over head and clearing a space around him."

"Take him alive! take him alive!" shouted Strahm, who kept at a safe distance in the rear.

This, however, would have been a difficult, if not a doubtful undertaking, but for the fact that one of the renegades who had been knocked down crawled up on all-fours behind the brave old man, and seizing him around the legs, threw him heavily to the earth, at the same time dealing him a stunning blow on the forehead with a heavy revolver. But the renegade's victory was short-lived, for scarcely had he struck the old man ere a long, glittering blade of steel was thrust from the bushes, hard by, and driven into the breast of the outlaw!

Then forth from the cover of the thicket leaped the figure of a man, with a sword in his hand, and confronted the band of infuriated ruffians, his eyes blazing with an unearthly light, and his features wrought into a terrible expression. He was a man of perhaps forty years, tall and athletic, with dark-blue eyes, a noble face covered with a full brown beard reaching to his chest. His head was bare and his hair was thrown back from a high and intellectual brow, across which transversely ran a bright red scar. He was dressed in a blue flannel shirt, the collar of which lay open revealing a deep, hairy chest, a pair of dark-colored pants and handsomely wrought Indian moccasins. He was armed with but a single weapon—a long, slender sword, but there was something in his presence—his flaming eyes, his stern, set features, that caused the savages and renegades to recoil slightly before him.

As the stranger sprung from the thicket and turned facing the mob, he shouted in stentorian notes:

"Back, devils! back!"

An exclamation of surprise burst from Strahm's lips.

The savages and renegades rallied, and prepared to renew the conflict with their new foe.

Old Spokane was rising to his feet when the haft of a flying tomahawk again brought him to the earth unconscious. Another was aimed at the head of the mysterious stranger, but the latter threw up his sword and received the weapon so that it glanced harmlessly into the air. Then as flashes the lightning among the storm-clouds, so flashed the saber of the unknown about his head and in the faces of the foe. The head of a savage advancing toward him appeared to leap from the shoulders and drop to the earth, while the body, obeying the impulse of the will, continued to advance a step or two before it fell, a horrible headless thing—the blood spouting in jets from the severed arteries of the neck.

Not a savage dared to advance within the reach of that scintillating blade, for their tomahawks had been parried with dexterous skill until only their knives and firearms were kept in hand.

Donald Strahm, who from the first had kept in the rear, saw that his friends were wavering before the deadly steel of the one swordsman. He saw that something must be done and that speedily, or all would be lost, and drawing his revolver he essayed to shoot the stranger. But the latter was on the alert, and seeing the movement of the man, he lunged forward far enough to catch the revolver on the point of his sword, and by some dexterous twirl of the blade snatched the weapon out of Strahm's hand and sent it spinning out of reach into the brush!

With a muttered curse Strahm backed into the bushes, turned and fled, followed by his surviving friends.

The mysterious swordsman glanced around him, passed his hand over his brow and then, as something of the past seemed to flash through his brain, he turned like a wild beast and with glaring eyes and set teeth fairly hissed:

"God in Heaven! that man was Norton Fenwick! Fool that I was not to recognize him sooner, and slay him like a dog! Curses upon him! will I never get rid of his accursed presence? Will the vengeance of Heaven ever—"

His mad soliloquy was here cut short by a groan from the lips of Old Spokane, and advancing he bent over the hunter, lifted him in his arms as though he had been a child, and carried him down to the water's edge where a little canoe lay upon the beach. Placing the wounded man in the craft he pushed it into the water, then sprung in himself, took up the paddle and drove the boat out into the lake. With long and vigorous strokes he sent it fairly leaping through the water in the direction of a little island.

Gradually Old Spokane recovered his senses, and before his rescuer was aware of it the old

hunter had risen to a sitting posture and was gazing around him in bewilderment.

"How is this, anyhow?" the old fellow muttered, passing his hands over his eyes.

"It is all right now, stranger," assured his rescuer, and at sound of his voice he glanced quickly around as though aroused from a dream.

"Ah! I see! It's you, stranger—things have been a leetle mixed with me. Be you the grim boatman rowin' me over the Dark River? or be you the man that come to help me out in my fight?"

"I'm that man, sir, and you're safe in my boat and care."

"Bully! bully!" exclaimed the hunter; "I am right now—got my bearin's. I remember that I got a whack on the head that kind o' knocked me endwise. But say, stranger! Did you wallop that outfit o' red and white devils?"

"I did, and routed them, horse and foot."

"Kill any of 'em?"

"Yes, I had to, but the one I ought to have slain got away."

"Who war that—Norton Fenwick?"

"Ah! then you know that man?"

"I should proclaimate I did, stranger; but maybe you and I know each other; my name's Spokane Joe—what's yours, stranger?"

The man glanced at the old hunter as if searching the inmost recesses of his heart; then, as if fully satisfied of his honesty by the free and open expression of his bearded face, he replied:

"My name, Spokane, is Aaron Benraymond."

"Aaron Benraymond!" repeated the hunter, thoughtfully; "I guess you and me never met before; but I should say you war made o' good material, and that you slashed that blade round in a fearful nasty way. I'd like to 'a' see'd it all, but— But say, Mr. Benraymond, whar be you takin' me to?"

"Here—to this island," replied Benraymond, as the canoe came to a stand among some drooping willows at the edge of a little island.

"Wal, I'll sw'ar, stranger, I hadn't ought to stop here, for I left a couple o' friends over on the lake."

"Wait a few minutes—until it is fairly dark, and I'll take you ashore," announced Benraymond, rising and stepping from the canoe onto the island.

Old Spokane could not object to this offer of his gallant friend; so he, too, rose and leaped out of the boat, and as he did so he felt the whole island tremble under him. In an instant the startling truth flashed across his mind—he was aboard the mysterious floating island that he and his friends had discovered from camp!

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

"Oh Lord! Oh Lord!" groaned Old Kit Bandy as he stood as if rooted to the earth, his eyes fixed upon the panther that was dragging the body of Wilma Rodman along the narrow ledge, "the poor gal's dead, dead, Baby Sam!"

"But, Kit, her body shall not be mutilated by that beast!" said Baby Sam, his face pale, and his voice half-choked with the grief surging up in his breast. Then he threw a cartridge into his rifle, and raised it to his shoulder.

"Be keerful, boy!" cried Old Kit; "ye'r nervous—the gal may only be in a swoon and you might hit her. Steady, boy, steady!"

But there was no need of these words of caution, for the Boy Giant was calm, cool and deliberate, and glancing along the barrel of his gun he took a careful aim and pressed the trigger.

Simultaneous with the crack of the weapon the panther dropped its prey, uttered a low, fierce howl of pain, lashed the rocks with its tail, then rolled lifeless from the ledge and fell with a thud on the rocks below.

The death of the panther, however, did not at all release the body of Wilma Rodman from peril, for it was now left partly hanging over the ledge, fifty feet above a bed of jagged rocks, while the rescuers could find no place where they could scale the vertical heights.

"Horn o' Joshua!" exclaimed Old Kit, "how on earth did that critter ever git up thar, boy, with the gal?"

"Kit," replied the young mountaineer, "let us run back along the cliff in the direction whence the panther came and maybe we can find an ascent. That beast surely reached that ledge from this valley, and if so, it was done not far from here."

So they turned and ran back along the base of the cliff, but to their bitter disappointment they were compelled to travel a long distance

before they found a break in the perpendicular heights. When they did, however, Baby Sam flew up the acclivity, and then, at a speed that taxed Old Kit to even keep in sight, he glided back along the ledge.

Before he was aware of it the young guide was out of sight of the old man, but a slash of blood on the ledge before him brought him to a stand. He waited till Bandy came up, then pointed to the blood, saying:

"Kit, look there! we will find Wilma dead," and the youth's whole frame now shook with emotion.

"Boy," assured Old Kit, looking around him, "this is the very spot whar ye shot the panther—where it bled!"

"No, no, that cannot be, Kit, or where's Wilma's body?"

"I fear, lad, it's—"

"Fallen over the ledge?" exclaimed the distracted boy.

Kit made no reply, but advancing to the edge of the cliff, shaded his eyes with his hand and glanced steadily below for several moments.

"By the horn o' Joshua!" he suddenly ejaculated, turning to Baby Sam; "I see the carcass o' the painter, boy, but the gal's body is not there!"

"You don't tell me, Kit?" and a ray of hope kindled in Baby Sam's eyes; "then she must be alive, and has been spirited away by—"

"Or else she's got up and deliberately walked away," put in the old man.

"I fear such a thing's too good to be true, Kit," said Sam, "but let us hurry on, for if she went away of her own accord, I know she is badly wounded and may yet fall from this ledge and be killed."

"Ha! look thar, Baby! that tells the tale," said the old man, pointing down to the imprint of a moccasined foot in the thin layer of dust that had sifted from the rocks above; "the poor gal's in the clutches o' the red-skins again; and that tells me she's alive, for a red-skin wouldn't spend much strength in totin' off a dead gal. But let's hurry on, and maybe we can overhaul them afore they escape into the deep woods."

"Kit," observed Baby Sam, as they hurried along the ledge, "I see you're a regular border-man—an old Ingin trailer."

"Yes, boy, if thar's a gal in the case," replied Kit, with a smile, "I'm hard to beat. I allers war a pesky fool 'bout pretty gals, Samuel, and it's queer, too. You'd naterally think that a man that'd lived with Ellen Sabina Bandy—that carried a scar for every day of seventeen years' married life—would be soured on the hull female fraternity; but it ar'n't so. Old as I be, I'll bet a patch o' blue sky that some sweet little baby-faced gal o' about sixteen could jist lap me round her little finger like a ribbon; that's the kind o' a tormented ole fool I be. I've sworn a billion times I'd never look on womankind ag'in only with crucifyin' daggers in my eyes, but here I am ready to die for that little gal Wilma, and that's some more o' the kind o' an ole fool I be!"

Baby Sam was in no mood for jesting, yet he could not repress a smile at the whimsical humor and grievances of the eccentric old man.

The ledge they were following finally terminated in a broad descent, running gradually down into the deep wooded valley, and the trail, which was that of a single Indian, was easily followed down the slope and through the woods. On reaching the valley it trended away toward the Yellowstone Lake, and as that sheet was not over a mile or two away the pursuers felt exceedingly hopeful of overtaking the red-skin before he reached it, for, as no footprints but his own could be seen, it was quite evident that, if he had the maiden at all, he was carrying her, and thus incumbered could not long keep up the speed with which he had evidently started.

But they were entirely mistaken in the speed and endurance of the Indian they were following, for, ere they were scarcely aware of the fact, they stood upon the shore of the Yellowstone Lake, at the very edge of whose waters the trail ended. But glancing out over the water, Old Kit exclaimed:

"There they go, boy!—off yander!"

True enough, a canoe with two occupants was gliding over the lake nearly a quarter of a mile away. That one of the occupants—he who plied the paddle—was an Indian, there was no doubt, but the other one appeared to be reclining in the boat, and Kit and Sam could not make sure it was Wilma, but from the fact that the trail running from the ledge had ended there at the lake, and there being plain evidence of the one that made the trail having em-

barked in a canoe from that point, there was little doubt left in their minds but she was in the craft.

"By the horn o' Joshua! we're at the end o' our string, Baby Samuel," Old Kit averred, somewhat disheartened.

"Why so, Kit?"

"We've no boat to foller that red devil; we can't walk the water, and night's comin' on. Isn't that enough to break a man's heart? Can you see any hope for us?—any sunshine?"

"We must not forgit, Kit," suggested Baby Sam, "that there were two of the captive maidens, and if Wilma's in yonder boat, Sarah Marshall is still back somewhere in the wooded valleys."

"Ay, lad, your head's level; and we should look for her while there is a chance."

"Yes, at once!" and Sam led the way back into the valley and began a careful search for the trail of Sarah's captors.

But darkness finally coming on put an end to their search for that day, and with a feeling of despondency they began to look about for a place to stop for the night. While thus engaged, they suddenly discovered the faint glow of a light some thirty rods away, which they concluded must be that of a camp-fire. Whether of friend or foe they could not determine from where they were, and so they moved cautiously toward it, making a *detour* to the right so as to avoid the opening between them and the light.

It required but a few minutes to reach a point from whence they could command a full view of the fire and all within its radius of light. As they had suspected, they found it to be an Indian camp, and to their joyful surprise they discovered Sarah Marshall there, though she was bound hand and foot, and fastened to a tree, against which she was reclining. To their bitter disappointment, however, they soon discovered that there were eight or ten savages instead of the two who had started with the captives from Wilma's Island; and the only consolation they could get out of their discovery was that neither Scott Dresden, the outlaw, nor any of those with him at the island at the time of the duel, was with the party.

The Boy Giant and Old Kit held a whispered consultation. What to do they could scarcely decide upon in the face of such great odds, but finally the ingenious Old Bandy said:

"I've a suggestion to make, Baby; them Ingins are all Si-oxes, and not one of them war on the island at the time of our duel. The two that took the gals away from the island are both there, and I think they've accidentally met the others and camped together. Now, I've a notion to take the bull by the horns, sail right into that camp and make myself to home till a chance is offered to liberate that gal."

"It may cost you your life, Kit, if those Ingins have heard of your conduct at Wilma's Island."

"All right, boy; I'll be dyin' in a gal-orious cause; so let's retire away and arrange the preliminaries."

Rising, the two moved back into the deeper shadows, and when their plans had been laid for the rescue of Sarah, Old Kit announced:

"Now, Baby Sam, I'm goin' to buck the tiger in his den, and if I should go under, and you should ever meet hereafter a fellow named Ichabod Flea, tell him his old pard Kit Bandy, Mountain Detective, died with full harness on."

With this request the old wood-tramp turned and moved silently away through the darkness, leaving the Boy Giant absorbed in deep and painful thoughts.

CHAPTER VII.

SABINA BANDY.

AFTER their surprise and capture on Wilma Island, Sarah and Wilma were hurriedly taken to the mainland and moved away at a rapid speed by two large and fierce-looking savages. When a mile or two from the lake the girls heard the report of guns behind them and the sound of a conflict. They knew what it meant, yet they knew not the fate of their friends.

Not a moment's rest was allowed them during the day, but as soon as it grew dark the Indians halted for the night, having first sought the impenetrable labyrinth of a dense thicket. To prevent their escape, and yet permit the captives to rest, each one was closely wrapped in the folds of a large blanket which was securely fastened with cords, evidently brought along for the purpose, wound around and around her from head to foot, thereby making it impossible to move hand or foot, and even making it difficult to breathe. And there, through all that

long night were they compelled to lie in those strait-jackets, suffering untold agonies of body and mind.

Bright and early the next morning they were released of their bonds, given some dried venison and hard bread for breakfast, then the tramp was resumed. But the captives' strength began to fail fast, and before noon it was all they could do to move one foot after another, and finally they sunk down with sheer exhaustion. They were then lifted in the brawny arms of their captors and carried from the valley up a steep hillside, around which they proceeded until they came to a ledge or terrace continuing on around the hill. Here they stopped, evidently with the intention of resting their captives; and to make sure that they did not get away or escape captivity by leaping over the heights, they were again rolled and wrapped in blankets as on the previous night.

Half-dead, the poor girls leaned their heads against the rock at their back and wept in silence, while the Indians assured of their security, walked away as the maidens supposed to procure game for food.

Thus several moments had passed, when a slight, unnatural sound arrested the attention of the girls and they raised their tearful eyes and looked around them. To their horror they beheld a huge panther crouching near, his eyes fixed upon them and his tail lashing the rock, as if in the very act of springing upon them.

A cry burst from Sarah's lips and she sunk down in a swoon. When she recovered her senses she saw the two savages standing over her, but Wilma was gone! She told the red-skins what had happened, when one of them started in search of the missing girl, but the report of a rifle around the ridge scared him back, and taking Sarah they hurried away, manifesting no little alarm.

They traveled on until nearly nightfall, when they were met by a party of half a dozen Sioux warriors coming into the valley from the direction of the Indian village. All went into camp where they met, a fire was lighted, and a consultation held. From the fierce looks, the frantic gestures, and vehement speeches of each and all, it was evident to the captive maiden that they were greatly excited. The consultation finally ended in two of the red-skins leaving camp, but for what purpose Sarah could not conjecture.

Being supplied with abundance of fresh deer-meat, some of it was broiled and given the captive who ate it with good relish. But while the food gave strength to her body her mind was sorely troubled. The unknown fate of her friends at the island and of Wilma almost distracted her.

As the minutes wore away, and the shadows of night deepened around them, the savages bound her to a tree so that she could either sit or lie down at pleasure. A blanket was thrown around her shoulders to protect her from the chill air and another was arranged for her as a bed. But, she had no desire for sleep—her fears and suffering forbade it; she sat like one half-unconscious, taking but little notice of what was going on around, when suddenly, she, as well as the savages, was startled by a strange sound like the bleating of a moun aingoat.

Instantly the red-skins were all upon their feet, not with the excitement of fear but delight, crying out:

"Big Horn! Big Horn! white Sioux!"

Then out of the shadows of night into the light emerged the author of this sudden excitement. He was a tall, angular-built fellow, dressed and painted as an Indian, but his features, as well as the white rings around his eyes and mouth, where the paint had worn off, told that he was a white man in disguise. The Indians hailed him with shouts and other demonstrations of joy to which the ungainly and comical-looking renegade replied:

"Yoop-pee! Good-evening, my red brothers! Big Horn is rejoiced to meet you here. He is tired, but happy as a coyote on the trail of a wounded deer. He has fit hard and traveled far. But I see my brothers hev but one of the pretty white squaws. Mahla, where is the other one?"

"Don't know, sure," replied the Indian addressed as Mahla, speaking in his own language; "let Big Horn question the white squaw for she cannot talk Sioux."

"I'll do so," replied Big Horn, and with a lofty step and lordly mien that were both ludicrous and comical, he strode over to where Sarah sat, and squatting down before her, said: "Wal, little 'un, this isn't so nice as it might be, is it?"

When he first approached her Sarah had turned her face, not deigning to notice him, but there was something so peculiar and sympathetic in the man's voice that she could not help turning and looking him square in the face. As she did so the expression of contempt on her face vanished, and a faint ray of hope seemed to kindle in her eyes, as she replied:

"Yes, sir, this is dreadful."

"Yes, indeed!" Big Horn affirmed, "but be of good heart—these Ingins can't understand much English."

These last words left no doubt in the girl's mind but that the renegade's language was fraught with a double meaning, and she could but take courage from it, notwithstanding the presence of the leering, savage faces gathered around her.

"Can you tell me, miss," the renegade went on, "what your friend is that war captured with you on the island?"

"I cannot," Sarah replied, but she briefly narrated all that she knew of Wilma's disappearance.

"Wal, gal, you be o' good cheer; thar's heap wusser things than bein' an Ingins princess and lordin' it over the heads and hearts o' a pack o'—"

The renegade's words were here cut short by a sudden, sharp, shrill cry behind him. The savages started with an exclamation of surprise, and they turned and beheld a strange intruder before them. It was a woman—a white woman, too, who, without fear or warning, had boldly entered their presence. She was a woman past mid-life, rather tall and slender, with a thin oval face, a prominent nose, and sharp gray eye. She was dressed in a coarse brown frock, a flaring sun-bonnet, and coarse cow-hide shoes. On her left arm she carried a small, time-worn reticule, and in her right hand an old faded umbrella.

Scarcely deigning to notice the red-skins this woman, with her bonnet thrown back and her eyes fixed upon the renegade with a triumphant light flashing from their depths, made her way toward him, fairly screaming in a sharp, falsetto voice:

"At last! at last, oh, please the Merciful Master!"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the renegade, "'tis she—my wife, Sabina Bandy!"

"Yes, vile wretch!" hissed the woman, and she dealt Old Kit a whack over the head with her umbrella, that rattled like an avalanche of dry bones, "'tis she, your wronged and deserted wife, your helpmeet—she whom you wooed and won in her girlish innocence only to desert—fling aside like an old shoe—crucify, when the freshness and bloom and sweetness of maidenhood had faded from her form and face. Oh, ungrateful monster!" and she again gave vent to her feelings in another rattling blow with the umbrella, over the renegade's head.

The Indians seemed to understand the situation and to enjoy the scene of domestic infelicity with infinite delight, and so made no attempt to arrest the woman or check her fury.

"Woman—Sabina, have mercy!" pleaded Old Kit Bandy, for he was the renegade.

"I'll have mercy!" retorted the wronged wife, "you iron-hearted monster—you soulless wretch! I'll show you how to desert a true and loving mate and flee unto the mountains and tribes of the wilderness, you vagabone! And oh, to think!" and she broke into a sob, "I find you here—monster of fifty years—billin' an' cooin'—makin' love to a baby-faced girl of sixteen! Did ever a wronged wife behold such heaven-high, world-wide unfaithfulness?"

"Sabina, hear me," said Old Kit, pleadingly; "I can prove by this gal herself that I said nothin' fectionate—nothin' in any way that'd conflict with my marriage vow to love, cherish and pro—"

"Oh, hush your palaver, Kit Bandy! I've heard that same old, old strain billions of times before! I would not believe you again—never! You're a multitudinous liar, a monumental robber of woman's affection—a murderer of woman's happiness, a Judas Iscariotic betrayer of woman's love. Ingins"—and she turned to the leering savages, "noble red-men of the forest, this man is my lawfully wedded husband—my buck—my brave. He left my wigwam without meat; the fire by which we'd often smoked the pipe of peace and chatted, went out, and cold and hungry and lonesome I went out, too—in search of the gallavanti' scalawag. For many suns have I searched for him, and now that my labors are ended with reward, I feel happy, rejoiced, sublime."

She addressed the Indians, much to their surprise, in their own language, which fact seemed

to have at once won their friendship and savage confidence.

After submitting meekly to his wife's tirade for several minutes, Kit Bandy arose and walked to the fire, and squatting down before it, plucked a brand from the blaze, then tossed it back again in a kind of mental abstraction. This he had repeated the second time, when, all of a sudden, a yell that seemed to come from brazen lungs burst from the gloom of the woods, and the next instant Baby Sam, the Boy Giant, with a huge club in his hand, dashed into the camp!

Before the red-skins could comprehend the situation the young mountaineer was upon them, dealing terrific blows right and left; and amid the crunching blows of the boy's club, the yells and howls of the savages, the "ping!" "ping!" of a tiny revolver in the hand of Sabina Bandy rung out as the old woman danced about the camp, apparently wild with excitement. To still add to the confusion of the moment, all was suddenly plunged in darkness by Old Kit Bandy scattering the fire with his feet in every direction.

This act was followed by yells of savage dismay, shouts from the lips of Old Bandy and shrieks from Sabina and Sarah. But this lasted for only a moment—in fact the entire conflict lasted only a few brief seconds—then all became quiet, save the sound of hurrying footsteps and the deep groans of the wounded Sioux.

A red-skin hastily raked a few red coals together and fanned them into a blaze, and its light revealed to them a startling sight. Half of their number lay prostrate on the earth, while none had escaped without more or less injury. The Boy Giant, Kit Bandy and his estimable spouse, and the captive, Sarah, were all gone!

An examination of the dead warriors showed them some had fallen under the boy's club, others had been shot with a tiny bullet, and one or two killed by knife-thrusts.

It quite readily occurred to the savages that the Boy Giant had not wielded all these weapons, and then it flashed through their savage brains with the force of lightning that the renegade, Big Horn, and his wife, had dealt deadly blows against them in the conflict!

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD SPOKANE'S RETURN TO CAMP.

OLD SPOKANE JOE was not a little surprised when he discovered that he was on the mysterious floating island, but he experienced no fear or uneasiness when he realized that its occupant was Benraymond, the man who had rescued him from danger. He said nothing, however, of his discovery, and advancing with his friend through the border of dense willows that fringed the island, he was conducted into a little tent that was pitched a few feet from a low, thatch-roofed cabin. There was nothing in the tent but a couch, and upon this the old hunter was requested to seat himself. Then Benraymond proceeded to dress the wound upon his—the hunter's—head, and when he had completed this second act of kindness to him, Spokane said:

"You're a good Samaritan, stranger, I swan you be, as well as a hull regiment in a fight. Again am I indebted to you for helping me out."

"Not at all, Spokane, not at all," replied Benraymond, seating himself before his guest; "but I would like to ask you a question or two."

"Drive ahead, stranger."

"Do you know that man, Norton Fenwick?"

"I see'd him once before; he's Donald Strahm, now."

"When did you see him before, Spokane?"

"Some years ago."

"You and he seem to be enemies. I overheard some of the words that passed between you."

"We never war enemies till to-day. He tried to crowd me and I wouldn't be crowded."

"He's a villain, Spokane."

"Then you know him well, stranger?"

"Yes, but it was thousands of miles from here."

"Whew! then you must be a foreigner! Dutch? Irish? or English?"

A smile passed over Benraymond's bearded face.

"I am an Englishman," he replied.

"Come of good blood—away up 'mong the nabob regions, eh?"

"I come of a good family, I am proud to say, Spokane."

"What the all-fired mystery you doin' here in this lonely, out-of-the-way place?"

"Why, Spokane, this is the grandest spot on

God's earth. I have traveled the world over and found no such place as the Yellowstone Park."

"Are you livin' here all alone?"

"I like solitude," Benraymond replied, with some evasion; "but since this place has been defiled with the presence of that man, Fenwick, it will scarcely be to me what it has been."

"Then he's an enemy to you, eh?"

"Yes, worse than that—a curse. He is a demon at heart, and I assure you he is in this valley for no good purpose. Whether he knew I was here or not until we met this evening, I know not, but I do know that I leathed the very soil he trod on and came here to be rid of his presence—the sound of his voice—the mention of his name, and now, like the curse that he is, he comes here. I tell you, Spokane, this valley will not hold both of us long. But what surprises me now is your being acquainted with him, and his demands of you."

"I presume so, stranger, but I've nothin' to say now about it—reckon you overheard what passed atween us?"

"I heard some of it, Spokane."

"What we said 'u'd be nothin' to you, stranger."

"Ay! but maybe it would; I have always thought that that man's sins against me have reached even into America. He always swore that he would have my life-blood after having destroyed my happiness and ruined me."

"Stranger, I think you're mistaken; it's scemethin' else besides your life he seeks here in America—somethin' that I alone can give—somethin' I never will give, so help me God."

"I overheard some remarks he made about a child," said Benraymond, his eyes fixed searchingly on the hunter's face.

Spokane started slightly, and for a moment both he and Benraymond were silent. To the hunter there was something almost irresistible in the presence and voice of the mysterious man, and through fear of his own weakness—that he might be led to reveal the one great secret of his heart, he changed the subject of conversation by saying:

"Stranger, pardon me, but it's now dark, and as I'm awful afraid that demon Strahm 'll slip 'round and injure my friends, I'd better be goin'."

"Spokane, unless you insist on me going ashore with you, I will loan you my canoe if you'll return it to-morrow."

Anxious to know more of Benraymond, the hunter promised that he would return the boat. He was satisfied there was some mystery about the island and its brave and noble occupant. He had seen but very little of the place, and once was sure he heard other footsteps than those of Benraymond on the island.

Bidding him good-night, Spokane proceeded to the boat and was soon afloat on the lake under the shadows of night. He headed southward, but owing to the darkness he could not tell exactly where to land, and to make sure that he did not pass beyond the camp, he put ashore about two miles from where he had met Strahm and his minions.

By this time the moon had come up, flooding the surroundings with a weird and wondrous light, and the first thing Old Spokane saw on landing was the imprint of a booted foot in the sand. In fact, there were scores of tracks, but all were evidently made by the same person passing to and from the lake. They led back into the shadow of the pines, and Old Spokane made up his mind that some one must be in camp thereabouts, and proceeded to make a reconnaissance. But he had advanced but a few paces into the woods when a voice, accompanied by the click of a revolver, demanded:

"Who comes there?"

"Don't shoot, man!" quickly responded the hunter, for the voice was familiar, although he could not just then recall the name of the person; "don't shoot!" he repeated; "it's I."

"Who are you? Spokane Joe?" asked the voice.

"I should proclaimate it was," was the laconic reply, "and for the life of me I can't name you."

"I am Frank Rodman."

"No!" exclaimed the hunter.

"Yes, and pretty well used up, Spoky."

"Good Lord! can this be, boy?"

"Walk out into the moonlight, and you'll see."

Together they walked out of the shadows into the light and as Old Spokane looked upon the man a cry burst from his lips.

It was Frank Rodman true enough, but he could scarcely recognize him with his pale face, bandaged head and soiled garments.

"Great geysers, Frank! have you been in the clutches o' a grizzly? Tell me, boy, what's wrong?"

"Everything Spoky," replied the young man; "do you know that the Sioux are scattered all through—"

"Yes, yes, boy; but you don't mean to say they—"

"They attacked us at Mary's Lake. Several of them were ambushed on Wilma's Isle, and when Baby Sam landed there with Wilma and Sarah the girls were captured, and when we three boys went to their rescue we were set upon and Fred Sears, and for all I know, Baby Sam, was slain."

"And are the gals still captives, Frank?"

"I know nothing to the contrary."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the old hunter; "this'll kill your poor old father! Boy, what's the meanin' of it?"

"I know not, Spoky, but there is treachery at work somewhere. Those savages knew to the very day when we were to be at the island. By agreement, Baby Sam met us there and carried us to the island in his boat—taking the girls first, for the boat was too small to carry all. On the way over with Fred and I, Sparrowhawk, the Friendly Crow, who'd also been on the island and had discovered the intention of the Sioux, swam unobserved by them alongside our canoe and warned us of our danger. We were about half-way to the island but at once turned back to the mainland, and after a consultation we resolved to attempt the rescue of the girls. So we re-embarked for the island, on which we landed and were in search of the girls when attacked by eight or ten savages. Poor Fred fell dead at the beginning of the fight, though not before he got in his work on a red-skin. The next moment I fell under the blow of a flying tomahawk at the side of Baby Sam."

"But how came you here, Frank?"

"That's the remarkable thing of the whole affair; after Sparrowhawk had warned us of our danger he swam off. He is such a peculiar Indian that we thought nothing of his not going to help us; but when I recovered my senses after the fight I found Sparrowhawk sitting at my side in under a great projecting rock at the water's edge. From him I learned that he did take a hand in the fight on the island; but after I fell and the battle seemed to be against us, the Indian dragged me from the field down into the lake unobserved by the Sioux, who were intent on killing or capturing Baby Sam. How the Indian accomplished it I cannot imagine, but he swam with my body to a place of refuge and there dressed and bandaged my gashed head. But, Spoky, that noble act of the Crow was my reward for caring for him and giving him medicine and food when he lay sick in our settlement a year ago when all others refused to go near him, believing he had the small-pox."

"Boy, ye know the Scripser says to cast your bread on the waters; but whar's the Ingin now?"

"Off in search of Wilma and Sarah. I came here in hopes of meeting you and father, but feeling weak and tired, I told the Crow I would rest here till he came back."

"Wonder the red-skins didn't find you here," said Spokane.

"Are they around here, too?"

"I should say so, boy—see that?" and he raised his hat and displayed a bandage on his head; "a red-skin's hatchet did it."

"Is father safe, Spoky?" the young man asked, the shadow of a fear creeping over him.

"Was when I left, boy, 'bout an hour before sunset. He's been feelin' happy all day over the thoughts of meeting you young folks to-morrow or next day."

"Poor father! it will almost kill him when he learns the fate that has befallen our party. How far is he away, Spokane?"

"Not over a mile away this blessed minute; but it'll nighly craze him when he sees his boy all battered and pounded up. And poor Baby Sam! the Gallatin valley will weep for him and refuse to be comforted, but never, no never, will the Boy Giant be forgotten. His name, brave and noble soul, will go down in the tradition of the valley for a thousand years— But say, Frank, we'd better hurry along to camp."

"But I promised Sparrowhawk I'd remain here till he returned."

"Oh, he'll find you, or else we'll move our camp down here, for I reckon we can do nothin' huntin' for the gals till the Ingin gits back."

"All right, Spoky. I'll do what you think best."

Concealing his canoe, Old Spokane led the way toward camp, where they finally arrived

to find Mr. Rodman and Professor Drood sorely uneasy about the old hunter's safety. But the presence of his son there in such a plight, and the news be brought of the Wilma Island tragedy almost drove the father frantic with grief, and it was all his friends could do to restrain him from rushing madly away in search of his idolized daughter, and talk him into quiet and composure. When they did, however, Old Spokane narrated his adventures around the lake, though he withheld that part relating to Donald Strahm's demands upon him for the restoration of his child, and his timely rescue by the mysterious Aaron Benraymond.

After hearing the old man's story, Henry Rodman made up his mind that Donald Strahm and the man Benraymond, were some way, directly or indirectly, responsible for the presence of the Indians there in the valley; though, in view of the kindness and help given Spokane, he could not associate Benraymond in criminal league with Strahm. His views, however, were entirely at variance with those of Old Spokane, and the more they discussed the matter the more it became involved in perplexing mystery.

CHAPTER IX.

BABY SAM IN TROUBLE.

IN the conflict in the Indian bivouac where Sarah Marshall was held a captive Sabina Bandy, the wife of Old Kit, played an important part. Concealed in her bosom was a tiny revolver, which she did not hesitate to use when the life of her recreant lord was endangered, but what was the most surprising was that she used it against the red-skins, her husband's boon companions.

Then as soon as all had been wrapped in darkness by Old Kit sweeping the fire in every direction, she turned and ran to where Sarah stood, and with a keen-edged knife severed her bonds, at the same time saying:

"Come, child—quick! escape with me!"

Scarcely aware of what she was doing, Sarah permitted herself to be hurried away into the Egyptian darkness of the woods, nor was she permitted to stop until a point was reached at a safe distance from the scene of conflict. Then old Sabina seemed to realize for the first time that they were alone.

"Please the Merciful Master!" she exclaimed, "we are away from them horrid savages, but have become separated from Christopher and that big boy, and in this darkness we'll never find them. If I only dared to I'd call Christopher, but that'd just tell the Ingins exactly where we were."

"Mrs. Bandy, what if your husband and Baby Sam were slain?" said Sarah.

"It'd be dreadful, child, dreadful; but if Christopher's the same man he was years ago he'll dodge them Ingins, for he's an old dodger. I've known him these years, the old deceiver."

Meanwhile the "old deceiver" and Baby Sam had taken advantage of the darkness that fell so suddenly on the combatants to escape into the woods, going in the direction they supposed Sabina and Sarah had taken; but, to their disappointment, they soon discovered that they were separated from the women entirely.

"What in the plague are we going to do, Kit?" Sam asked.

"We'll have to do the best we can, and if we don't run across the weemen to-night, maybe daylight'll make matters all right. If it wer'n't for that leetle gal, I'd not bother myself 'bout that old lady, for I'll bet if a cyclone'd carried her away from that camp she'd turn up all right some day with reticule and umbrella in hand. She's no tenderfoot, is Sabe, and when it comes to a real fight she's a hull litter o' wild-cats, she is by the horn of Joshua! Say, didn't ye hear the 'ping' of her little shooter when the ball opened? Why, Baby, she can hit the Goddess o' Liberty on a silver dollar ten yards every pop; but, say, did ye git hurt any in the racket?"

"Not the least; everthing worked like a charm in the attack, but our bad luck comes in losing the girl."

"Let's move along, Baby, and mebbe we'll stumble across them somewhere. If we come within their hearin' old Sabina'll let it be known, and don't you forgit to remember it."

So saying they turned and moved away—wandering around in an aimless sort of a way that was quite discouraging to the Boy Giant.

They traveled on for an hour or more then they sat down to discuss their future course. The silence of the place was broken by the boil and bubble of the "Mush Pot," a local name applied to a boiling vat of chalk, and the rush and roar of a great geyser about a mile away, known as Old Faithful.

"After a few minutes' talk, the two resumed their tramp. They moved back into the hills and soon found themselves traversing a narrow defile where the shadows lay deep and dark. Side by side they moved on until the way became so narrow as to compel them to walk one behind the other. Old Kit took the lead. The defile grew deeper, darker, narrower, as they advanced, and finely Baby Sam observed:

"I guess this pass's going to run together, Kit."

"Looks that way."

But they moved on and finally found the defile growing a little wider. Suddenly the Boy Giant exclaimed:

"Stop, Kit—listen!"

They came to a stop and listened, when the sound of footsteps was heard coming behind through the pass, mingled with low, excited voices.

"Plagues of Egypt!" exclaimed Baby Sam, "we're being pursued, Kit."

"Yes, and by the eternal Satan!" responded the old mountain detective, "I hear the voice o' the outlaw, Scott Dresden, among them—Thar! that war his cussed lip!"

"Forward, then, old pard, forward! We need more room than we've got here to do some royal fightin'."

They hurried on through the defile that was now growing more tortuous and difficult to follow than ever. But this suddenly ended in a good-sized opening walled in on all sides by rising vertically to the height of hundreds of feet. But to their utmost astonishment they discovered the smoldering embers of a camp-fire, that gave forth a faint glow, close in under the wall on the right, and in its dim light they saw some articles of clothing, blankets and camp equipage that bore a suspicious look.

"By the horn of old Joshua!" exclaimed Bandy, as he gazed around him, "we've run right into the devils' rendezvous, boy!"

"Yes, and hear them coming, Kit!" said the Boy Giant.

At one side of the retreat the fugitives saw a continuation of the defile, and at once made toward it, but it was so narrow that Old Kit, with difficulty, pressed himself through sideways, saying, as he did so:

"Good Lord! boy, you'll never git your big carcass through here! Take off that cartridge belt and pass it through to me—reduce yourself and squeeze through—quick, for they're comin'!"

Unbuckling his belt he handed it, with his rifle, through to Kit, then turning his left side to the passage, he said:

"I'll squeeze through, Kit, or bu'st this old mountain."

With all his great strength the young mountaineer crowded himself into the passage, but before half his body was concealed the jaws of the great rocks seemed to fasten upon him and hold him as if in a vise.

The voice of the pursuers could now be heard but a few paces away.

"It's no use, Kit," Sam protested; "I can't make it—I'll have to fight."

"Then git back, boy, so's I can help you—quick!" ordered Kit.

"I can't, Kit, I'm fast—wedged in—flee, man, while you can!"

Scarcely had the last word fallen from the brave boy's lips ere Scott Dresden, the outlaw, burst into the retreat followed by a dozen or more companions, most of whom were savages.

With a yell that went rearing up through the black defile, Dresden, like a panther, sprung forward to seize the Boy Giant. But the latter's strong right arm was free, and when the villain came within reach he seized him by the shoulder, and with all his prodigious strength swung him around and drove his face with mighty force against the rough, jagged wall, cutting and mashing it in a most frightful manner, and knocking the breath out of him.

But the next moment a dozen violent hands seized the Boy Giant and dragged him from the jaws of the trap that had caught him, opening the way through which four savages glided in pursuit of Old Kit.

A desperate hand-to-hand struggle now ensued between Baby Sam and the foe, and the boy bid fair to hold his own, when a cowardly renegade struck him on the head from behind and brought him, half-stunned, to his knees. In this condition the brave youth was soon overpowered and securely bound, when wild yells of savage triumph rent the very heavens.

Then an outlaw threw a few pine sticks on the bed of coals, and soon a bright blaze lit up the place. But the most distressed-looking object revealed to the gaze of the victors was the face of their leader, Scott Dresden.

Half-blinded and choked with blood, and suffering the most intense agony, the outlaw chief turned to his followers and, in terrible passion, exclaimed:

"Man, take that fiend incarnate to the nearest boiling spring and throw him in alive! The devil shall have man broth for his breakfast!"

CHAPTER X.

DONALD STRAHM CALLS ON SCOTT DRESDEN.

EAGER for the fiendish work, Dresden's followers seized the Boy Giant and started to drag him away to the nearest boiling spring, but before they were out of the retreat the outlaw chief said:

"Hold on, men; let us wait until morning. I want the young demon to brood over his fate awhile; besides, I want to see him flop and flounder when he goes into the broth-pot."

With evident disappointment the outlaw's menials brought the prisoner back and rebound his feet and forced him to be seated.

The suffering of Dresden was fully equal to his revengeful fury. One of his eyes swelled shut in a few minutes, while his whole face was cut and bruised beyond recognition. The only alleviation he could find was in constant application of cold water, and to obtain this he had to go to a little mountain-stream, over two hundred yards from the "Grotto," as the outlaws called their rendezvous. He took three men with him as a body-guard, and there for hours he sat and bathed his face and swore, and swore and bathed.

It was long after midnight when he returned to the Grotto, feeling considerably easier, but in nowise improved in looks. To his joy he found that the number of his friends had increased during his absence, and that Donald Strahm, one white man, and three Indians were the parties joining them.

"Great hounds of Satan!" exclaimed Strahm, as Dresden entered the Grotto. "Captain Dresden, you look as though you'd been fighting a wind-mill."

"There's the cause of it!" hissed Dresden, pointing toward Baby Sam.

"So I understand; but I congratulate you on his capture."

"Thanks, my Lord Fenwick," returned the outlaw, "but if we'd succeeded in getting that cunning devil we've known as Big Horn, then I'd be happy, for the ends of justice would soon be served. I tell you I mistrusted that renegade all along, and now to him and that big lummix of a boy there, we are indebted for the loss of both of those girls that we have worked and planned so long to capture at Mary's Lake."

"Thunder and Mars! you don't tell me, captain?"

"I do, sir; after the girls had been captured, and that Boy Giant also, I detailed each one to kill the other, for I wanted Big Horn out of my way as well as Big Sam, and cuss me if they didn't turn on us, killed Stackpole and Doyle, who were acting as seconds, and then dropped two more men, and the rest of us barely escaped with our lives. Then again—just to-night—Big Horn joined a party of our red-skin friends who'd still one of the girls in custody, and played his role of 'big Ingin, much brave,' and the first them red-skins knew, that big hound was upon them like a hurricane beating them down with a club, while Big Horn shot, and kicked and cut. The result was that the girl was rescued and run off in the night. We heard the battle and hurried forward to take a hand, but were two minutes too late. You see, not one of the Sioux knew of Big Horn's treachery at the lake, and so he played it handsomely. Lord Peter! if I'd only been there in camp when he came in, I'd made him 'blat.' So you see our campaign's a flat failure so far as the capture of the girls is concerned."

"I think I can tell you where one of the girls is, captain," said Donald Strahm.

"Indeed?"

"To-day, or yesterday, rather, toward evening, we saw a small canoe gliding across the waters of the Yellowstone Lake, and it contained two occupants, one of which was a woman beyond a doubt. The boat touched at a little island which we afterward discovered was a floating island."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Dresden; "my lord, I'm afraid our game's going to be checkmated all around—we've been given away by a traitor."

"Then that traitor must be Big Horn, who, while we were holding secret meetings in your lodge in the Sioux village, overheard all by eavesdropping. I tell you that fellow's not a

fool by any means, Scott Dresden. But I hav'n't told you of the biggest surprise of the season, captain."

"Well, I'm prepared now to hear of 'most any kind of a surprise, my lord," said Dresden.

"Well, you remember I told you all about my troubles with one Warren Hanover, the son of the earl of Hanover, in England, of his disappearance and my trip to America on business with Mrs. Ann Kirby? Then you remember that I told you that Jack Prunty, the settler with whom I'd left my child had been massacred by the Indians, that the child had been taken captive but was afterward ransomed by a party of emigrants bound for the West, and that for two years I'd searched among all the settlements of the territories for my child, and that I had finally fixed upon a certain girl as being mine from her wonderful resemblance to her dead mother."

"Yes, yes," replied Dresden, "I remember all that, of course, but where does the surprise come in?"

"Why, sir, by accident I stumbled into the camp of an exploring-party to-day under one Professor Drood, and who should I meet there, well and alive, but my man, Jack Prunty, sailing under the colors of Spokane Joe."

"Oh, Moses and the bullrushes! you don't tell me Old Spokane Joe's your treasure-keeper?"

"No other, sir, no other than Jack Prunty, but he pretended not to know me in their own camp, nor did I pretend to know him. I concluded my bird was already in the bush, and that it would only be a question of time until it was in hand. So I said nothing to them more than to tell them I was a disgusted prospector anxious to get out of the country, but my man, Prunty—Old Spokane—it seems, suspected all was not right and followed me up; but one of my scouts discovered the fellow, and we laid for him and finally cornered him on the lakeshore. As I had him foul, as I thought, I demanded my child's whereabouts, but, sir, he had the accursed impudence to tell me it *wasn't* my child I'd left with him, and flared up and showed his teeth. So I had to call out my men, and the old tiger shot one of them down, and but for the fact that I wanted him alive he would have been annihilated there and then. Finally one of the boys tripped him up and the battle seemed won; but before he could be secured a tall, bearded man, with eyes glowing like a demon's, bounded from the cover of some undergrowth with a long, whip-like sword in his hand, and so dexterously and so rapidly did he handle the flashing blade that his very head and shoulders seemed surrounded by a nimbus of flame. I drew my revolver to shoot him, but he divined my intention, lunged forward, and somehow or other—I don't know exactly how—he caught my weapon on the point of his sword and twirled it out of my hand like lightning. And that man, my dear sir, was no other than Warren Hanover, the son of the Earl of Hanover!"

"Great mortality!" exclaimed Dresden, "do you suppose he is on a trail, too?"

"I can't see for the life of me how he can be. I think our meeting simply a coincidence."

"I'll be cussed if it don't begin to look like a coincidence that is likely to bring us more trouble," replied Dresden; "but what became of your English swordsman?"

"Well, the fight was a drawn battle. After I lost my revolver I leaped backward to escape the fellow's sword, when my folks, supposing I was lighting out for dear life, turned and ran, too; but our gallant foe did not follow us, and the next we saw, him and Old Spokane, as we supposed, was in a boat pulling out into the lake. They finally touched at the same island where the other boat had landed its occupants."

"By heavens! that island's got to be pulled," declared Scott Dresden, "for it may be the point from whence all our trouble is emanating."

The two villains had carried on all this conversation in the hearing of Baby Sam. They regarded him as powerless to do them further harm, but when the subject had so changed as to include the Boy Giant, Donald Strahm turned to the prisoner and said:

"Perhaps you could tell us something about the conduct of Big Horn, Baby Sam—in other words, what's he up to?"

"He's up to your little game," replied Baby Sam.

"He is, eh? Well, what else can you tell us?—do you know where those girls—Wilma Rodman and Sarah Marshall are?"

"You impudent scoundrel!" the Boy Giant fairly hissed, "if I did know I'd die a dozen deaths before I'd tell you!"

"Oh, he's a mad fool!" Dresden snarled, "but he'll get the chance to-morrow morning to die one death, that'll atone for some of his murderous work, now mind."

By this time night was well advanced, and after the guards watching the approaches to the grotto had been changed, Dresden and Strahm rolled themselves in blankets and laid down to rest.

Bright and early the next morning they were astir. An ample supply of food that was concealed in the grotto was brought out, cooked and eaten; and after their matutinal meal, which had been washed down with villainous whisky, Scott Dresden turned and shouted out: "Now, men, to the Devil's Broth Pot with that young bruiser!"

Up to this moment Baby Sam had entertained a faint hope that, if die he must, he would be killed outright, and not subjected to the hellish tortures conceived by the brain of the monster, Scott Dresden.

It was not over a mile to the great geyser known among the hunters and Indians as "The Devil's Broth Pot," though pointed out to tourists now as "Old Faithful." Its eruptions occur at intervals of about seventy minutes with all the regularity of the flow and ebb of the ocean's tide. It lasts about twenty minutes, then ceases, and the boiling flood sinks out of sight in the crater to gather new force for another outburst.

It was but a short time till the outlaws and savages, with their captive, came in sight of the geyser. It was located on the summit of a large, cone-shaped knoll that for ages upon ages had been forming from sediment thrown from the geyser. The sides of the cone were cut into hundreds of little channels by the rushing of the waters. In the little valley at its base was a large channel through which the boiling liquid escaped into the Fire Hole river that flowed hard by. Just across this channel was a gradual ascent crowned with a dense growth of pines.

The geyser was quiet when the outlaws came in sight of it.

"Hadn't we better wait here until after the 'Pot' boils again?" said Dresden, stopping at the edge of the pines near the foot of the cone.

"It hasn't been twenty minutes since it ceased its tumult," responded Strahm; "and it will be nearly an hour yet before there is any danger from its spouting. In that time we can go over to the crater, dump our game and get back here. I say let's push right ahead and get the job off our hands."

"All right; forward march!" commanded Dresden, leaping the channel and beginning the ascent of the cone.

Four men conducted the doomed boy toward the geyser with his hands tied at his back and a revolver at his head. The Indians were all left on the safe side of the cone. Their superstitious fears would not permit of their approaching nearer to the dreaded "Broth Pot."

In his fiendish desire to hurl the author of his battered countenance into the great caldron, Dresden hurried on and reached the crater a hundred paces in advance of those who were laboring along with the captive. He stood on the very rim of the crater, whose diameter was fully six feet, and gazed down into the hot, cavernous depths from whence came an ominous gurgling sound. He felt the marble-like earth beneath his feet shake and quiver with internal emotion. He could see the boiling fluid rising slowly in the porcelain-lined throat of the crater; and suddenly he heard and felt the roar of underground thunder that was immediately followed by the upward rush of hissing steam that caused him to start back in alarm. And this in turn was succeeded by a hoarse gurgling moan, a violent trembling of the cone, when, with the force of a mighty hurricane, a river of boiling water six feet in thickness shot up into the air to the height of two hundred feet. The rays of the sun, which was just rising above the distant mountain range, shone upon the mists of white steam and formed a bright rainbow above the summit of the column of indescribable splendor and glory, while the water bursting outward at the top of the column, like a gigantic fountain, descended to earth in a perfect torrent of pearls. But, grand as was the sight, the situation was equally as perilous. Of this the outlaw was fully aware, and turning with a shout of warning to his friends, he dashed away to escape the falling flood of boiling water, which, being undisturbed by the air, fell with equal and thunderous force all around the summit of the cone. Soon a mighty flood was rolling down the slope in one broad sheet, and the outlaws in charge of Baby Sam,

seeing their deadly danger, turned and ran for their lives, knowing that the boy must follow or perish in the scalding flood.

The Boy Giant readily realized his situation. He saw that the time for him had come to act not only in saving himself from the water, but to elude his foes, and throwing all his prodigious strength into one superhuman effort he burst the bonds that fettered his hands and once more stood free.

At this very juncture Scott Dresden dashed past him at a wild, breakneck run, and when but a few feet away stumbled and fell heavily to the earth. Before he could rise the Boy Giant was upon him, and stooping, he seized the villain by each ankle and swung him around upon his back as though he had been a mere child. Then drawing each of the yelling outlaw's feet over his shoulders the boy dashed away, but he did not go in the direction taken by the others but bore sharply off to the left so as to turn his back almost upon those standing at the foot of the cone.

Dresden, hanging head downward clutched frantically at the air and yelled like a demon, but in the hands of the young Hercules he was powerless. Sam's sole object in thus carrying him was to protect himself from the bullets of the savages waiting among the pines. It was the boy's only hope—an expedient that his quick brain had conceived, and his giant strength enabled him to carry out.

But the successful execution of the young mountaineer's plan of escape was greater even than its conception, for by the time he was fairly under way the flood had overtaken him, but in spreading out over the cone its depth had been so reduced as to enable the hundreds of little channels before mentioned to carry the boiling flood. But even then the fugitive could proceed only by leaping from one projection to another, in doing which a single misstep would prove fatal.

The moment the savage saw the boy's desperate move, they set up a wild yelling and opened fire with their rifles. Baby Sam could hear their bullets whistling around him, but he knew they were not shooting to kill, for the life of their leader was in equal danger with his own, and he had heard the whistle of bullets too often around his head to be intimidated by the sound.

With his eyes fixed on the earth before him, his teeth set and every nerve strung to its utmost tension, the brave boy bounded along amid the scalding, steaming rivulets and at last reached the great channel that received the flood at the foot of the cone.

With a breath of relief he dropped the outlaw, leaped across the ditch, bounded up the gentle slope beyond and plunged into the shadows of the pine woods a wild, ringing shout of defiance pealing from his lips.

But scarcely had he gone a dozen steps among the trees when a voice called out to him:

"Here, boy—this way!"

He glanced to the right and saw Old Kit Bandy approaching, his face aglow with excitement and joy.

"Glory, Kit! I'm glad to meet you!" the boy exclaimed, breathing heavily.

"Here, lad, 's your Winchester and cartridge-belt—good thing you give 'em to me—magazine's chock-full—shoot the devils down if they crowd you!"

Baby Sam took the belt and quickly buckled it around him, then, as he grasped his rifle, a stern smile wreathed his lips, his big eyes flashed with the light of a desperate determination, and stepping behind a rock, upon which he rested his gun, he said:

"Now, curse them, it's my turn!"

Soon he caught sight of two red-skins—one behind the other—gliding along like hounds upon his trail, and quickly glancing along his rifle he pressed the trigger and both savages fell dead—the report of the gun rolling away in sullen echoes and mingling with the roar and tumult of the Devil's Broth Pot.

Quickly the young mountaineer threw another cartridge into his rifle, and the glimpse of a moving figure among the pines invoked another deadly shot.

Several moments of silence now elapsed and no more savages appearing, Old Kit, who had stood an admiring spectator of the young giant's deadly work, said:

"By the ram's-horn of Joshua! Baby Samuel, you're a splendid lump o' humanity—an uproarious young hurricane. I reckon the devils 'll not tamper with a bottled cyclone soon again. But, say, Baby, what on earth were you doing over there near the geyser?"

"Why, my brave captors took me over there

to throw me into the crater, to make man-broth for the devil's breakfast."

"And what saved you, lad?"

"He who controls the destinies of man, and whose mighty power is seen in the wonders of Wonderland. The geyser began to flow before they got me to the crater, and I was saved."

"Bless the Lord!" said Old Kit, reverently. "I came in sight just as you shouldered that feller and started. I'd 'a' put in a shot for you, but I war afraid the report o' the gun might lead you to think enemies were in front of you, as well as behind, and throw you off your base."

"That scoundrel I covered my retreat with was Scott Dresden, and I don't see what I was doing that I didn't throw him into the escape-channel that was half-full of scalding water."

"It war a pity, boy, it's true, but you did nobly in savin' yourself, for I'll swear you're needed now, lad, if ever you were. Them poor gals—"

"Yes, yes, Kit, they must be saved!" interrupted the boy, and, shouldering his rifle, he turned, and the two moved away through the cool morning shadows.

CHAPTER XI.

KIT BANDY LETS HIS LIGHT SHINE.

IN hopes of meeting the friendly Crow, Sparrowhawk, Old Spokane Joe, Professor Drood, and Frank Rodman and his father broke camp at once and proceeded to where the hunter had found Frank and concealed his canoe. Here they passed the night in anxious waiting, but no Sparrowhawk came. And when daylight dawned great was their surprise to find that the canoe had been taken from where Spokane had left it, and they could account for its disappearance on no other theory than that the Crow had returned while Frank was away, and finding him gone and the canoe there had taken it away with him.

Frank Rodman sorely regretted this in view of the great kindness of the friendly, whose sensitiveness, he was afraid, might construe his absence into a lack of faith.

In hope's the Indian would yet come and bring some tidings of the missing girls the party remained there in camp, and if they were disappointed in his not coming, their patience was doubly rewarded by the sudden appearance in camp of Baby Sam and Old Kit Bandy, fresh from their adventure with the enemy at the Devil's Broth Pot.

Never were two men more surprised or overcome with joy than were Baby Sam and Frank Rodman on meeting there. They could scarcely believe the evidence of their own eyes, for each had given the other up as dead.

The name of Kit Bandy was not new to Spokane Joe, and when introduced to him he said:

"I've heard o' Kit Bandy before; he's a noted mountain detective, isn't he?"

"He is," replied Old Kit, with a bland smile, "and I hope merits your compliments, stranger. I'll admit that my physical make-up isn't as delectable as that of Adonis."

"Ah, but it's not that, Kit, that makes the man—it's the riggin' inside that does the work," Spokane averred.

Baby Sam and Frank Rodman at once made a comparison of notes touching on the adventures of each since their separation at Wilma's Island, and when the Boy Giant had narrated his exploit at the Broth Pot, and then recounted the story he had heard Donald Strahm tell his confederates of his—Strahm's—adventure with Benraymond, Old Kit Bandy did not fail to notice that Old Spokane and Henry Rodman manifested no little uneasiness. Taking it for granted that the old hunter was Jack Prunty, as Strahm declared he was, the old detective could not understand why Rodman manifested so evident a surprise and fear—why the outlaw's story should affect him more than any other person a stranger to the transactions between Strahm and Prunty.

Mentally the old detective resolved to show his light on the subject as soon as an opportunity offered, and this soon came through Baby Sam, who said:

"But, friends, I think Mr. Bandy, here, knows something about this man Strahm—at least, I have had an intimation to that effect, and think now is a good time for him to let it be known, if he does."

"Well, now," said the old man, "the boy's not far from right, I can tell you. To be plain, outspoken and truthful, I, Ka-ristopher C. Bandy, am a detective, and have been for twenty years or more. I've confined myself to the peraroes and mountains altogether, and have operated from Manitoba to Mexico, and in order to circumvent outlaws, road-agents, murderers, thieves and villainy of all kinds, I've been compelled to assume the character of Ingin, outlaw, miner, hunter, preacher, ranchero—in fact, everything good and bad. I'll admit I've used some deception and trickery that'd make a less scrupulous soul restless, but you understand we detectives have to often be rogues to catch rogues."

"For three years past me and my old pard, Ichabod Flea, have been workin' up a big case that made it necessary for me to become an Ingin—a bold Sioux warrior; and in connection with what I've heard you folks talkin' about, along with what I've been able to deduce from the same, I want to add that your secret troubles *mu* case exactly."

"Is this possible, Kit?" exclaimed Henry Rodman, betraying the deepest emotion; "but pardon the interruption—go on."

"Well, to go back to the beginnin', it was about three years ago while I was recuperatin' in Denver,

an English lawyer—detective, as he called himself—and an elderly lady named Martha Meggs called on me and said they'd a first-class job for me and that if I'd work it up two thousand pounds should be my reward. I told 'em to state their case and I'd see what there was in it before I undertook to foller it up, so Hoopel, the lawyer-detective from London, told me this story: he said that 'bout twelve years or so before one Warren Hanover became a widower with a little gal baby left to his care. The loss of his wife, along with other troubles, almost drove Hanover ravin' distracted, and so his physician advised him to travel—to wean himself from his sorrows by goin' to some foreign land. Actin' upon this advice he consigned the child to the care of a widowed lady named Kirby, and promised, if alive, to be back in two years. About six months after Hanover's departure Mrs. Kirby got a letter from her only sister, living in America, urging her to come over and live in the land of promise and freedom, and Mrs. Kirby was crazy to do so, but she didn't know what to do with the child in her care. But one Norton Fenwick, a cousin of Hanover's dead wife, came to her rescue and advised her to go and take the child with her, and when Hanover returned he would make it all right with him. He also said that he would write Hanover of the fact so that he could visit them in America when he reached there, as was his intention before he returned to England. So Mrs. Kirby bundled up and put off for America and settled near her sister in one of them extreme Western States. A few months later who should appear upon the scene but Norton Fenwick, who demanded the child, saying he wished to take it back to England—that Warren Hanover had returned from his trip and was fearfully enraged over his inducing Mrs. Kirby to go away with it to America, and a whole mess of such stuff. He never asked Mrs. Kirby to go back with him, but said that he could manage the child alone—that the good women on shipboard'd help him take care of it, and so Mrs. K. finally give up and let him take the child. But he was scarcely out of sight before she began to mistrust all was not right, and bein' a woman of pluck, if not of the best of judgment, she disguised herself in male attire and followed Fenwick, who, instead of goin' to England with the child, went west over a hundred miles and there left it in the care of a border settler, and his wife, named Jack Prunty."

At mention of the name Old Spokane and Henry Rodman exchanged significant glances that the detective did not fail to observe.

"Mrs. Kirby," Kit went on, "followed Fenwick in his attempt to dodge around to New York, and when the opportunity was offered made herself known and demanded the reason for his action, and when he informed her it was none of her business she told him she would have him arrested for kidnappin', and he out with a revolver and shot her down dead, as he supposed. It war months before she recovered so as to travel. Fenwick had escaped of course, and with woman's tact, Mrs. Kirby accounted for the shot as an act of her own—attempted suicide. Fenwick had doubtless figured on this theory himself, for he left the revolver lying at her side where she fell."

"Well, havin' assured herself that baby Hanover was in good hands, though she never let any o' the fact 'bout the child come to the ears o' Jack Prunty, Mrs. Kirby returned to England in disguise, determined to bring her would-be murderer to justice. She knew there was something villainous at the bottom of his conduct with baby Irene, and the blood o' the avenger plunged madly thro' her veins. She changed her name to Martha Meggs, and sought the confidence of Matthew Hoopel, the lawyer-detective who began to lay for Fenwick. But the audacious scoundrel seemed to have mistrusted that he war in danger, and so all at once he put out for—well, nobody knew where, and so Martha Meggs began to fear her game had dodged her for good. But she waited and watched with Ingin stoicism. In the meantime Warren Hanover returned from his travels after 'bout three years' absence. Mrs. Meggs sought him out and revealed to him her whole secret—confessing she'd been duped and deceived by the villain Fenwick. Hanover was mad—furious—wild. He told Mrs. Meggs that Fenwick was the worst enemy man ever had—that ever since he'd won and wed his—Fenwick's—cousin he'd pursued him like a demon. Fenwick wanted the law himself, and he swore when Hanover married her he'd pursue them to the grave. Hanover said the villain's constant threats and slanderous tongue had killed his wife, and now proposed to continue his vengeance by stealing his child. But Mrs. Meggs and he at once posted off for America after the child, but judge of their heart-rendin' surprise when they reached here to find that Jack Prunty and his wife had started on further west with some emigrants and that all had been massacred by the Ingins. This nighty drove Mrs. Meggs mad, while Warren Hanover was completely crushed in spirit. Mrs. Meggs remained in America with her sister who war still on the frontier, while Hanover went away she knew not where nor does she to this day."

"Time went by and one day Mrs. Meggs met a Mrs. Phebe Connors, who'd once been a captive with the Sioux, and had been ransomed. Upon inquiry she found that woman was with the emigrant train at the time Prunty and his family were reported killed; but Mrs. Connors did not believe Prunty and the child were killed or captured, but she saw his wife slain. The last time she saw Jack was in the evenin' jist before sunset. He war on a hoss goin' down the river to see 'bout the cattle that war in corrille, and he took the little babe with him. When he war a short ways from camp the Ingins burst upon the unsuspecting emigrants, and in a minute nighty all were slaugh-

tered. Prunty had a good chance to escape, and Mrs. Connors thought he did. While a captive, a white man came to the Indian village with the outlaw, Scott Dresden, searchin' for the child Irene, and from the description of him Mrs. Meggs thinks it war the villain Fenwick. From a conversation Mrs. Connors overheard between Dresden and the stranger, she was satisfied that Dresden had a hand in the massacre, and he assured the stranger that neither Prunty nor the child was killed. With this information Mrs. Meggs returned to England and again sought the aid of Matthew Hoopel, determined to find the child if it was livin'.

"But in the mean time years had passed by. Warren Hanover had not been heard of for several years, and his friends all supposed he had been killed or died in Australia. Through Hoopel, Mrs. Meggs also learned that the child, Irene Hanover, through her dead mother, had become heir to an immense fortune which, in case of her death or non-appearance by a certain time, the court very singularly decreed, should revert to Norton Fenwick, next of kin. Now this being known to Fenwick, who'd returned to England off and on, you see it meant a fortune to him for the girl never to turn up alive, and learning that a search was being made for her in America—though he couldn't have mistrusted the source, for he was still ignorant of Mrs. Kirby's being alive—he struck out—or this was the supposition—to try and find her and get her out of the way.

"Now, as I said before, Matthew Hoopel and Mrs. Meggs came and employed me to hunt up the gal. That war three years ago. I took the trail pointed out by the ransomed captive, Mrs. Connors, and now from what Baby Sam overheard at the grotto when he war a captive, I think I've found the man, Jack Prunty, and that's you, Spokane Joe."

Old Spokane glanced quickly at Henry Rodman: the muscles of his mouth twitched nervously; he passed his hand over his brow like one in great trouble of mind. For a minute all were silent, but seeing every eye fixed upon him, the old hunter finally said:

"Yes, Bandy, I am that man, Jack Prunty."

"Well," said the old detective, coolly, "it appears that Donald Strahm is Norton Fenwick, and that he is aided in his search for the girl by Scott Dresden, the outlaw, and a pack of Sioux savages; and if she falls into his hands she's a dead girl."

"Good God! men, this must not happen!" cried Henry Rodman, springing to his feet.

"No, no!" thundered the Boy Giant, "nor shall it through my idleness here!" and the next moment the young mountaineer had caught up his rifle and was gone.

"What ails the boy, anyhow?" asked Old Kit; "has he got a jim-jam?—a fit? Hecra o' Joshua! men, that's the bravest, noblest boy God ever created. But to continue my story: from other things Baby Sam overheard in the grotto, Norton Fenwick and the father of that gal, Irene, must have met in battle yesterday by the lake-shore. The man Benraymond must be Warren Hanover."

"Then," cried Old Spokane, "Benraymond is the father of—"

He did not speak the name. His voice seemed to fail him, and turning he walked away as if overwhelmed with emotion, and looked out over the placid waters of the lake through a mist of tears.

CHAPTER XII.

A DARING ADVENTURE BY BABY SAM.

SABINA BANDY and Sarah Marshall fled from the scene of conflict back into the darksome hills, the old woman exercising all the skill and precaution of an old borderman; but being unfamiliar with the topography of the surrounding country, she could lead the way to no certain point. And as soon as she discovered that they were separated from Kit and Baby Sam, and that there was as much danger of running into as from troubles, she concluded that they had better conceal themselves until morning, which they did, Sabina keeping watch while Sarah laid down and slept. And when daylight came and the maiden was still asleep, Sabina did not wake her, but kindly watched by her side until she awoke.

Then the old woman took some cold meat from her reticule and shared it with Sarah, and after her sleep and frugal meal, the maiden felt greatly refreshed in both body and mind, and with high hopes she set off with her kind friend through the woods. They traveled on and on among the hills and through the valleys as much in hopes of meeting their friends as in finding their way out of the bewilderment into which they had drifted during the night. But they were doomed to disappointment in both, for suddenly, while pursuing their way through a dark, wooded valley, they were surrounded by a band of outlaws and Indians to the number of thirty and made prisoners.

This second misfortune crushed almost every spark of hope in Sarah's breast, and even Old Sabina's usual strong spirit gave way, and she fell to weeping in hysterical sobs.

Among the outlaws was Scott Dresden, with his black and purple swollen face. Donald Strahm was also with them, and he seemed more disappointed than elated over the capture of Sarah and Old Sabina.

The captives were at once marched through the woods to the northern extremity of the Yellowstone Lake, where they all went into camp on a densely-wooded tongue of land jutting out several rods into the water.

On the point an Indian found a large canoe, the possession of which highly pleased Donald Strahm and Dresden. The craft was at once brought into requisition as a prison for the captives, who were bound hand and foot and placed in it. Then the

craft was permitted to drift with the wind, which was from the north, out about twenty or thirty feet into the water, and there secured by means of an improvised rope attached to the painter. Thus were the captives doubly secured; and equal precautions were taken by the band to guard against surprise. The shadows lay deep around them. Not a speck of fire was permitted, and all were instructed to speak in low tones. Guards were stationed to watch every approach to the point, for Scott Dresden well knew that in Baby Sam, Old Spokane Joe, and Kit Bandy, he had wily and cunning foes to deal with.

Out beyond the black border of shadows that lay along the margin of the lake the moon shone bright and brilliant. A gentle breeze was blowing seaward, softly rustling the feathery pines and moving the waves into a low, mellow ripple; but these changeless, monotonous sounds seemed to make the silence of the night more profound. Dresden and Strahm, lying on the earth, slept soundly. They had laid down feeling perfectly safe in the vigilance of their lynx-eyed savage guards. But along in the night all were suddenly awakened by a sharp cry from the lips of a savage guard.

Instantly every man, red-skin and white, was upon his feet, weapon in hand.

The Indian that had given the alarm ran down to the extremity of the point, and, lifting his hand, pointed out over the water, saying:

"Boat git loose—drift off!"

"By the eternal shadows!" thundered Dresden, "the boat is loose and drifting away with the wind!"

And so it was, having reached a point over a hundred yards away before discovered.

"I was afraid of that frail rope," said Strahm.

"That rope never broke," replied Dresden; "it was either cut or untied," and hastening to the water's edge he found the shore end of the rope intact. Drawing it from the water he found it had been cut, a part of the old painter remaining to the new.

A volley of oaths escaped Dresden's lips. He stamped the ground in impotent rage, and would have shot the savage guards had he dared to have done so.

"Here, here!" he finally exclaimed, turning to the crowd, "who'll swim after that boat and bring it back? It's moving slow—an expert swimmer can soon overhaul it."

"Me go git him," said a savage noted for his skill as a swimmer and in the use of the paddle.

"Then go—quick!" commanded the furious and impatient outlaw.

Dropping his rifle and hatchet, and taking his knife between his teeth, the Indian slipped into the water, and, noiseless as a shadow, glided away through the waves with remarkable rapidity.

Scott Dresden watched him with serious doubts as to his reception when reaching the boat, which seemed to move faster the further it got away from the shore.

This, perhaps, the Indian did not discover, but when a few rods from the boat he did discover that he was not the only person endeavoring to reach the craft by swimming. Another form was cleaving the waters on his right, swimming obliquely across the waves. He could easily see that it was the head of an Indian, and, naturally supposing it was one of his own friends endeavoring to get in ahead of him, he renewed his exertions to maintain his reputation as a swimmer and reach the truant boat first. A few moments sufficed to take them both to the craft, alongside of which they glided together, though one on either side.

The first savage reached up his hand to grasp the gunwale of the boat, but before he could do so he was seized by the scalp-lock by the hand of an unseen figure that lay concealed in the shadow of the boat's prow in the water and jerked under the waves. He struggled desperately for life, but he was powerless in that strong grasp, and, deprived of breath, his struggles soon ceased.

The sound of the splashing water awoke the sleeping captives who quickly arose to a sitting posture and gazed around them in bewilderment. And as they did so they beheld the round, boyish face, over which hung wet elfin locks, and the massive shoulders of Baby Sam, the Boy Giant, rise into view on one side of the boat, while the dusky face and glittering eyes of an Indian rose on the other side.

A mingled exclamation of joy and fear escaped the woman's lips as they glanced from the boy to the savage.

The boy and the red-skin glared at each other in surprise across the boat, then as a light of recognition beamed in the eyes of the Indian, he articulated the name:

"Baby Sam!"

"Sparrowhawk, by smoke!" exclaimed the young mountaineer. "Oh, you buggerin' Injin, and you took the same notion I did!"

"Ugh!" ejaculated the Crow, his face aglow with triumph. "Baby Sam heap much cute like water-snake—swim easy—steal boat from outlaw and bad Injins—me start steal him—Baby Sam too quick—me see Sioux swim after boat—me swim after him—where Sioux now?"

"In the bottom of this lake," replied the Boy Giant; "I wrung his neck, so I did, and stopped his trap with water, and now he's a good Injin; but, say, Sparrowhawk, hold on to that side of the boat till I get in."

While the Crow balanced the boat Sam climbed into it, then assisted the red-skin in. The paddle had been left in the craft, and as soon as he got in the friendly took up the blade and plied it with all his strength while Baby Sam released the captives.

"Oh, Sam!" cried Sarah, joyfully, "you are a

brave boy! Surely if we escape from here alive it will be by your and Sparrowhawk's daring and fearless bravery."

"Where is Christopher, boy?" gasped Mrs. Bandy; "did he shrink from danger when the life of her whom he vowed to protect was in peril?"

"No, no, Mrs. Bandy," replied Sam, unable to repress a smile, "Kit Bandy is a brave and fearless man. I left him in camp over on the lake. But, Sarah, can you tell us anything of Wilma yet, more than what you told Kit Bandy while a captive in their camp the other evening?"

"I cannot, Sam," the maiden replied.

A great sigh escaped the young mountaineer's lips.

Before Dresden and his friends could define the situation regarding the escape of the boat, several hundred yards separated the craft from the shore. Several harmless shots were then fired at the fugitives and were answered back by loud, defiant shouts from the lips of Baby Sam that the midnight echoes repeated in rollicking, satyr-like glee among the hills.

After journeying some two or three miles out into the lake, the Boy Giant suggested that they land and spend the night on a little island that suddenly appeared before them. To this all consented and Sparrowhawk pulled for the island upon which they finally landed.

Baby Sam now narrated his adventures in stealing the prison boat from the enemy. From his concealment close by the camp he had noted every movement they made, and when he saw the boat with the captives pushed out into the lake, and that the guards had been stationed to watch the approaches by land, he entered the water and noiselessly swam along in the shadows on his back until the boat was reached. Then he cut the painter, and with his body submerged and head concealed under the prow of the boat, he swam backward, pushing against the craft with his head—all being done so silently and quickly that even the acute ears of the savages failed to detect his movements.

Both Sarah and Sabina complimented him upon the success of his daring adventure, nor did they forget to bestow equal praise upon Sparrowhawk.

After they had conversed a while upon the situation, Baby Sam concluded to lie down and take a nap, as he had had but little sleep and rest in three days and nights. Sparrowhawk told him he would stand guard over the island, and having implicit confidence in the honor and trustworthiness of the Crow, the young mountaineer dismissed all cares from his mind and threw himself on the ground under a cluster of dense foliage. He soon fell asleep and slept soundly, and when he awoke he was surprised to find it was broad daylight and the sun high in the heavens. He rose to a sitting posture to find himself covered with a soft, gray blanket that had been thrown over him by kind hands while he slept. But by whose? He knew there was not a blanket on the island when he laid down, and so he could not understand what it meant—how it came there.

The boy looked around him. To his surprise he could see neither Sparrowhawk nor the women. He listened, but heard nothing. Then he looked around to his left, and to his utmost astonishment saw a small island lying alongside the one he was upon, a small canoe bridging the narrow neck of water between them. Being positive the island was not there when they landed, it occurred to him in an instant that it was the mysterious floating island he had seen the day before; and while he still remained seated, wondering what new dangers or mysteries were soon to be revealed, he was startled by a movement among the bushes on the adjacent island. Fixing his gaze upon the spot whence the sound came he saw the figure of a young girl emerge from the bush, stop at the water's edge, and gaze toward him.

A glad cry of joy burst from the boy's lips, and he sprang to his feet, for in the fair face of the beautiful girl he beheld the radiant features of Wilma Rodman!

CHAPTER XIII.

A PIRATE-LIKE "RAFT."

With joy beaming upon every feature of his face, Baby Sam leaped across the water that separated the two islands and clasped Wilma Rodman in his arms and imprinted a fervent kiss upon her fair brow.

"Wilma, my dear girl!" he exclaimed, with all the rapture of his big, impulsive heart, and then for the time being he could say no more.

Brushing away the tears of joy from her eyes, and mastering the emotions of her young heart, Wilma lifted her face, and gazing up into the beaming eyes of her boy-lover, replied:

"Oh, Sam! haven't the days and nights been dreadful since we last met? And oh, how glad was I last night when I learned that you were alive and unharmed."

"But think of it, Wilma, the suffering we have all undergone," Sam found words to reply.

"Yes, indeed, Sam, our trip to the Yellowstone Park has been one of sorrow and danger instead of pleasure. From Sparrowhawk I learned that brother Frank barely escaped with his life, and that poor Fred Sears was slain."

"Yes, Fred was slain, Wilma, and Frank is now with your father, and—"

"Father?" cried Wilma. "Have you met him?"

"Yes, he and his friends are in camp over on the west shore of the lake now."

"Oh, isn't that joyful news!" and the maiden fairly clapped her hands and wept with joy; "but, Sam, does he know of my capture?"

"Yes, and he is bowed down with grief."

"Poor papa! how I wish I could go right over to him. I think our danger is all over with now, don't you, Sam?"

"I hope so," the young mountaineer replied; "but, Wilma, how came you upon this island? Who rescued you and brought you here?"

"I learned from Sarah, who is now in Mr. Benraymond's cabin, that it was you who shot the panther that was dragging me along the ledge, and—"

"And did the animal not injure you, Wilma?"

"Not in the least, and you may wonder at it, too. But you see those wretched Indians had wrapped me in so many thicknesses of a blanket, that the panther's teeth did not reach the flesh. It was Sparrowhawk, the friendly, who after you had killed the panther, carried me away to a place of safety. He was on the ledge at the time the shot was fired, and as you were concealed in the thick woods below he could not see you, but supposed that it was a Sioux that shot the beast."

"Well, good for Sparrowhawk," said Sam; "but what a queer Indian he is. He never opened his head to me about rescuing you or your being safe."

"He does not talk much, Sam, but he is a good Indian if one lives. He also saved brother Frank's life."

"Yes, so Frank told me," replied the Boy Giant; "but, Wilma, didn't Sparrowhawk bring you straight to this island after he fled with you from the ledge?"

"He did, Sam, though I was unconscious at the time, and you may judge of my surprise and bewilderment when I recovered to find a strange, bearded man seated at my bedside."

"Ay, it was Aaron Benraymond," said Sam; "do you know who he is, Wilma?"

"Nothing only that he is a noble, kind-hearted man, living here alone with no one but Sparrowhawk, his scout, for a companion. I think he has some great sorrow weighing upon him. Once when I awoke from a feverish sleep, long in the dead hour of night, he was sitting by my bedside weeping. It made me feel so sorry for him that I could not help weeping, too. Once he knelt by my bedside and prayed. Again I saw him pacing the floor of his tent with his eyes fairly blazing, his teeth set, and his whole being so changed that it frightened me. I thought he was going mad. I know you will like him, Sam, for he is such a noble and kind-hearted man. It was he who covered you with the blanket this morning, and would not let us awaken you. He said you were tired and needed the sleep and rest, and so all morning I have been waiting and watching for you to awake. Oh, you don't know how happy I am."

"I don't, eh?" replied Sam; "well, I only hope you are as happy as I am, my dear girl. But, Wilma, did Mr. Benraymond tell you anything of his past life?"

"Nothing, Sam, whatever."

"Well, I have heard so much of him that I am anxious to meet him."

"Come then with me, and your wish shall be provided," said Wilma, leading the way toward the cabin near the center of the island.

Reaching the door, she conducted him into the cabin, and when Mr. Benraymond advanced to meet them, she said:

"Mr. Benraymond, this is my young friend, Samuel Burling."

Otherwise known as Baby Sam, the Boy Giant," said Benraymond, with a smile, as he grasped the boy's hand and shook it warmly; "my boy, welcome to my humble home—you of whom I have heard so much. I am glad to meet you, my boy. I heard a little maiden talking of you in her sleep the other night, and for her sake am I also glad, for I see your coming has brought the roses to her cheeks."

Wilma blushed to the tips of her ears, while Old Sabina Bandy rocked herself to and fro and laughed heartily at the young folks' confusion.

"It is pleasant to know one's friends think of them when absent," said Baby Sam.

"True, very true, my boy," affirmed Benraymond; "but now, Sam, make yourself at home—just as you would in the cabin of an old hunter friend, and I'll go and prepare you some breakfast. The rest of us have had our breakfast. I would not let them arouse you, for I knew you needed sleep as well as food."

"You are very kind, Mr. Benraymond, but do not put yourself to trouble for me," said the boy.

"All I can do for you will be a pleasure, Sam," replied the man, and he retired to his kitchen apartment with a light step and happy heart.

Baby Sam now had an opportunity of looking around him. He found the cabin small yet a perfect grotto of glittering minerals wrought into strange shapes by the hand of nature and arranged into groups by Benraymond where the blending of colors rivaled the beauty of the rainbow. Quartz of agate, amethyst, flint, jasper, malachite and carnelian were there; also, feldspar, opal, pumice, and volcanic glass that sparkled like cut diamonds—each and all the production of that wonderful valley. Even magnificent specimens of petrified wood and imbedded animal life were displayed in great profusion, and all this fine collection, in addition to a pile of books, magazines and even newspapers, told how the strange man occupied, at least, part of his time.

After Baby Sam had partaken of a hearty breakfast he sat down to discuss the dangers of the situation with his genial host. He told him of his friends on shore who were no doubt sorely distressed over his prolonged absence, and the unknown fate of the maidens, and finally he arose, saying:

"I must go ashore, Mr. Benraymond, and find them, and not only tell them of the girl's safety, but warn them of the dangers that surround them."

"Give yourself no uneasiness about them, Sam, for I dispatched Sparrowhawk, my faithful friend and scout, ashore early this morning to find them and watch the foe."

"Indeed? You are very kind and thoughtful, Mr. Benraymond, and I sincerely hope—yea, I believe—that out of all this there is to come a reward that you are not dreaming of."

"Sam, what do you mean?" asked the man, fixing his great soulful eyes upon the boy with an almost prayerful look.

"Oh, I expect I've said too much now," replied the boy; "but you'll know all about it, Mr. Benraymond, as soon as you see Kit Bandy, whom I left in the camp of my friends last night."

"What, the husband of this woman in the cabin?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who and what is Kit Bandy, Sam?"

"A mountain detective."

"And is he—"

The man's words were here cut short by the sudden appearance of Sparrowhawk in the room in great excitement, and before he was scarcely across the threshold he exclaimed:

"Pale-faces in danger!—big float come—heap Sioux—heap outlaws—all come!"

Rising they followed the Indian out of the cabin and down to the water's edge, and from the cover of a fringe of willows they looked out over the lake and beheld the object of Sparrowhawk's excitement. It was a large, ill-looking log-raft floating down straight toward the island. Not a sign of life was visible about it, but this was accounted for, when, with the aid of Benraymond's glass, they saw that a breastwork of logs was laid up on the forward part of the raft, the rear being balanced with stones. Four Indian blankets were rigged as sails, and there being a fair breeze blowing seaward the murderous-looking raft moved at a fair speed.

"By heavens!" cried Benraymond, "it is an ugly craft, and if enemies are aboard of her they mean to do us harm."

"They Sioux and white outlaws," said Sparrowhawk, as if touched by Benraymond's remark expressing a doubt as to the crew, "me on shore—see 'em git on float—dodge here, dodge there—git 'way round and hurry here tell you."

"That settles it then, and they mean to board us," said Benraymond.

"It looks that way, sir," replied Baby Sam, "and since I left my Winchester ashore last night, I hardly know what to do. If I had it here I'd throw a feeler down against that breastwork that would give them to understand we were ready for them."

"Aside from the rifle and a pair of navy revolvers I have no firearms," said Benraymond, "and if they effect a landing, as they undoubtedly will, it will surely go hard with us."

"Can't you put your island afloat and get away from them?" asked Sam.

"No, it would only float with the wind, and we would be overtaken, sure, and that, too, when out further from shore. Were we alone—had we not the lives of those women depending upon us, we could give the scoundrels battle. Or, if we had boats in which to flee, we might elude them that way. We could send the women afloat in the boat we have, but we have no assurance that such a contingency has not been guarded against by the foe, and that they would not be captured by enemies lying in wait among the islands around us."

"Well, we'll have to do something, Mr. Benraymond, and that pretty quick."

"I have a plan in my head, Sam, that I believe will work; at least, nothing can be lost in trying it. That is, to remove the women and such things as we can to the adjacent island under cover, and then when the foe has landed on this island, as they will have to before reaching the other, blow it up."

"A good idea, though a desperate one, if you've got the stuff to blow it up with," said the Boy Giant.

"I have a can of giant powder in my cabin that I brought with me for mining purposes, but never used a grain of it."

"Great smoke! we'd hardly be safe on the other island, would we, to touch off a can of that powder?"

"We would be apt to hear the report and doubtless feel the shock," replied the man, with a grim smile.

"Well, it's a desperate case and requires desperate treatment. I'd rather be blown up by my own petard than cut down by a savage. But what we do, Mr. Benraymond, must be done at once."

"Yes, yes, let us be at work," said Benraymond.

The two turned and walked back to the cabin, Sparrowhawk having slipped away a few minutes previous. They found Wilma and Sarah alone in the room, and upon inquiry learned that Mrs. Bandy had gone out some time previous. Her absence, at the time caused a little uneasiness, and Benraymond started out in search of her. At the door he was met by a stranger, whose sudden appearance there startled him. How the man had ever reached the island without being seen by the watchful Sparrowhawk was a mystery to the recluse.

The stranger was a man of about forty years, rather small in stature, with a smooth, beardless face and a keen, bright eye. He was dressed in a closely fitting suit of blue jeans, cow-hide shoes and a queer-looking head-cover that could be called neither hat nor cap. In his belt was a pair of small revolvers.

"Good-mornin', sir," said the stranger, in a sharp,

shrill voice that sounded strangely familiar to Benraymond.

"Sir," replied Benraymond, rather abruptly, "I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance."

The stranger broke into a low, silent laugh.

"My name is Flea—Ichabod Flea, and I'm the pard of Old Kit Bandy, Esquire, in the detective business."

"But how did you get here?"

"Came in a boat, of course; but, stranger, seein' you don't recognize me, I'll tell you who I am as there's no need of further disguise. You knew me awhile ago as Sabina Bandy."

"Zounds!" cried Benraymond, "that is preposterous! ridiculous! such a deception is impossible, sir!"

"It might be in any one but Ichabod Flea," the stranger went on; "and I'll admit it's gitting the business down fine for a man to go gallavantin' around in female apparel, but you see we detectives have to resort to all kinds of trickery in order to trick the tricker. Moreover, you see I've the beardless face—never a hair grew on it—and the voice full of feminine sweetness to play the wronged wife to a demonstration and success which I've did for years off and on. Stranger, if you don't believe me, I can show you my female attire."

"Waugh!" suddenly exclaimed Sparrowhawk, gliding from the bushes hard by, a savage grin on his dusky face, "he tell truth—me see him take off squaw dress—make bonnet all up into dot on he head—waugh! he heap much durn cheat—he fraud—he! he! he!"

This evidence was enough for Benraymond, and despite the dangers that surrounded them the recluse could not repress a smile at the Indian's facetious remarks.

"Well, Mr. Flea," he said, "I'll have to accept Sparrowhawk's evidence, but it doesn't seem possible that such deception could be practiced. But why did you throw off your disguise?"

"No particular need of it now, and seeing you were likely to have some fighting to do, I wanted to take a hand in it and didn't want to take too much advantage of a female's attire."

"You confounded rascal!" exclaimed the Boy Giant, coming from the cabin, he and the girls having overheard the whole of the conversation between Benraymond and Flea; "I've a notion to chuck you into the lake. Such a monumental deception! You played the wronged and heart-broken wife so superbly that I shed tears of pity for you."

Ichabod Flea broke into a fit of hearty laughter, and but for the knowledge of approaching danger, all would have enjoyed the little detective's quaint and humorous revelations, stories of himself and the character he assumed.

By this time the raft of the enemy was not over eighty rods away, and so every moment now was precious.

Baby Sam and Benraymond did not make known to their friends the details of their plans of defense, but they inspired the breasts of the maidens with the assurance of their ability to cope with the foe.

Most of Benraymond's effects were carried over to the south end of the fixed island, the removal being made under cover of the floating island which stood between the other and the approaching raft. This done, the maidens were conducted to the same place, and then, while Sparrowhawk and Ichabod Flea kept watch upon the foe, Benraymond and the Boy Giant entered the cabin and closed the door behind them.

In the center of the room they placed the can of giant powder and piled around it a heap of the recluse's quartz collections. The muzzle of a pistol loaded only with powder was then inserted in the can and fastened there. To the trigger of the pistol a long string was tied, the other end of which was carried to the door of the cabin, and substituted for the latch-string with which the door was opened.

This done they left the cabin with door closed, about a foot of the fatal string hanging out.

The one serviceable canoe on the island was now taken around to the south side of the fixed island with the understanding that, in case they failed in defeating the foe on the little floating island, Benraymond was to take the girls in the boat and flee, while Baby Sam, Ichabod Flea and Sparrowhawk were to take to the water and swim for life.

By this time the enemy's raft was not over a hundred yards away, and so Benraymond sent his three male friends to the fixed island while he remained to watch the craft. He took up a position behind the cabin, and before the raft was within fifty yards of the island, a voice on board called out:

"Ho there, stranger!"

Benraymond made no reply.

"Hullo there, stranger!" again called the voice.

"What's wanted?" answered Benraymond, in a clear, ringing voice.

"Your unconditional surrender," was the reply.

"Who are you that makes that demand?" asked Benraymond.

"You'll find out to your bitter sorrow, Warren Hanover, if you raise a hand against me or my men. I give you two minutes in which to surrender."

A grim smile passed over the face of Benraymond, and he involuntarily grasped the sword at his side.

"You will have to take me dead if you take me," he finally replied, then he turned, and, keeping under cover of the cabin, hurried over and joined Baby Sam on the other island.

Again the voice on the raft shouted something that was not understood.

Several moments of the deepest silence now followed.

The Boy Giant and Benraymond stood in a clump of bushes near the center of the island, where they could command a partial view of the cabin and yet not be seen.

Presently a figure was seen gliding among the bushes on the floating island. It was that of an Indian, who peered all around him and at the cabin; then he turned and went back in the direction of the raft, and a few seconds later Scott Dresden, followed by Donald Strahm, half a dozen outlaws and a dozen savages, filed around the cabin and stopped in front of it.

"Hullo, in there!" Dresden demanded, but he received no answer, and with an oath he advanced cautiously, and rapped upon the door with the butt of his revolver.

Baby Sam and Benraymond involuntarily drew back and half crouched in the bushes.

"By the etern-!" they heard Dresden say, "I don't believe there's a soul inside of this hut."

"Open the door and go in," commanded Donald Strahm, in an imperative tone; "don't you see the latch-string's out?"

"Down, Sam!" whispered Benraymond, excitedly, and the next instant they were lying flat upon their faces, for they knew the awful crisis was coming.

CHAPTER XIV. A FEARFUL EXPLOSION.

SCARCELY had Baby Sam and Benraymond thrown themselves on the ground, when the very earth seemed to burst asunder and the heavens to fall with a roar and crash that rivaled the thunderbolts of Jove. The two men were fairly stunned by the awful concussion, and for several moments lay as if dead, while dirt, boughs and debris of every description rained down upon and around them, completely burying them under.

The shrubbery on the island bent to the earth as if in the fury of a hurricane, and the island itself rocked as if by an earthquake.

Digging their way from under the dirt and bushes, Baby Sam and the recluse found a gloom of sulphurous smoke hanging over and around them that was almost impenetrable, and fairly suffocating with its stifling fumes. But a smart breeze finally swept it away, and the two exchanged glances, terror being depicted upon the face of Benraymond.

"By the smoke of judgment! this is more than we figured on," said Baby Sam.

"My God, I should say it was!" responded Benraymond. "Just look around us at the ruin and desolation."

Overhead the trees were torn and stripped of their foliage and the boughs broken and blackened. Not a single log of the recluse's cabin, or the raft upon which the floating island had been constructed, was to be seen, and all that part of the island upon which they stood, from the northerly extremity to within ten feet of them, had been swept clean of vegetation, and even a part of the island itself was blown away. The lake still ran wild with angry waves that were black with debris. Not an outlaw or an Indian could be seen anywhere. The destruction of the foe seemed to have been terrible in its completeness.

"Sam, my boy," Benraymond finally went on, "if we'd been ten feet closer we'd have been killed."

"No doubt of it, sir," replied the Boy Giant; "I thought once I was dead—busted wide open; but I wonder how the girls stood the shock?—there goes Sparrowhawk and the little detective—Say, this way, men—how are the girls?"

"All right," answered Ichabod Flea, while Sparrowhawk, turning, glided back to tell the girls of Sam's and Benraymond's safety; "it made us all bounce, though, I tell you," the detective continued; "I'd smile if we weren't badly concussed. Great Jerusalem crickets! I thought the whole infernal regions had busted. And I see'd red-skins and outlaws go straddling up into the clouds of heaven in every shape; and the way cabin, logs, trees, dirt, stones and water flew was a caution to the oldest geyser."

"Well, I think that rids the earth of some of your enemies, Mr. Benraymond," said Baby Sam.

"I hope so," replied the recluse, "for God knows I have suffered enough at the hands of that man Fenwick, and now—"

Further speech was here cut short by a low, agonized groan issuing from the brush on the west side of the island.

"By heavens! some one of them is alive!" exclaimed Flea.

"Let us see," said Benraymond, "for no creature, be it ever so vile, if it is helpless, shall want for my help."

They searched the undergrowth, and true enough found the burned and blackened body of a man still living. His face was black as night, cut and bleeding. Most of his clothing was torn off of him, and as Baby Sam approached him and spoke, he lifted his face, and in agony shrieked out:

"I am blind! blind!"

"Yes, you are badly hurt," replied Sam, kindly.

"Yes, and I pray you will shoot me! I am dying of agony—I am blind—oh, quick! kill me!" and he clutched wildly at space.

"By the kissin' Judas!" exclaimed Ichabod Flea, aside to Benraymond, "that wretch is Donald Strahm!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Benraymond, with a start, a strange light burning in his eyes "then he has been spared to know that he is to die from his own sins!"

He walked closer and looked down into the face, but there was little there in the black and disfigured countenance resembling the once arrogant and baughty Donald Strahm.

"No, no," replied Baby Sam to the man's appeal to be killed and his misery ended, "I never strike an enemy when he is down. I'll help you through though—do what I can to alleviate your suffering."

"Then give me your revolver—do!" shrieked the man.

"No, I cannot do that."

"Who are you? I'm blind—I can't see!"

"I'm Baby Sam."

"Baby Sam?"

"Baby Sam! Then why don't you end my suffering? You're as heartless with me as I was with you. Is there no one by who will kill me? Where is Warren Hanover? He will kill me—tell me, Baby Sam, where is Warren Hanover?"

"I am here, Norton Fenwick," replied the recluse.

"Ha! that old voice!" exclaimed the wounded man; "that is his—the man I have pursued. Warren, I do not ask your mercy—I cannot—kill me—kill me!"

"No, I will not, Fenwick; I will help to care for you—nurse you back to health and strength," replied Benraymond.

The wounded man groaned in his agony, then, as if suddenly becoming delirious, he called out:

"Dresden! Dresden! where are you?"

"He's dead, Fenwick," said Baby Sam.

"Dead? What killed him? What happened? What crushed my body so and blinded me?" the man asked.

Benraymond dispatched Sparrowhawk for a blanket, upon which the wounded man was placed and carried to the interior of the grove. Then, despite his protestations and his begging to be let alone to die, water was brought and his body washed and bathed and his wounds bandaged.

After this treatment he became easier, and his groans and cries finally ceased, though his suffering was intense.

Ichabod Flea finally took Baby Sam aside and said to him:

"Sam, that man's bound to die, and we ought to have a confession from him before he goes off. And by all means Kit Bandy should be here."

"I can bring him here, I think, in a few hours," replied the Boy Giant. "I left him in camp not over four or five miles from here yesterday evening, and will start at once."

"All right, I will stay by Strahm, and when he becomes easier will endeavor to draw him out," said the detective.

Baby Sam told the rest of his friends of his intentions of going ashore, and, having borrowed Benraymond's revolvers and canoe, he took his departure.

Wilma and Sarah stood by the shore and watched him as he glided over the now tranquil waters of the lake.

Benraymond and Ichabod Flea watched by the side of the suffering Strahm. The former looked upon him in his blindness and misery with a stern look of mingled pity and disdain, but Flea kept up a sort of random conversation.

An hour nearly had passed since Baby Sam's departure, when suddenly a scream was heard at the lower end of the island. It came from the lips of one of the girls, and, hurrying down to where they stood, Wilma pointed out over the lake excitedly, saying:

"Oh, Mr. Benraymond! look, the Indians are after Sam!"

Looking in the direction indicated, Benraymond saw two canoes filled with savages in swift pursuit of the Boy Giant. They had put out from a couple of small islands, between which the young mountaineer had passed, and, as the savages were between the boy and his friends, there was no returning to the island. His only show lay in outdistancing the foe and reaching the shore, but from where his friends stood it looked as though his pursuers were close upon him.

"The red devils," said Flea, "were concealed there to cut off the retreat of the folks from the island, here, in case they fled from the approach of the raft. But the raft, oh, where is it?"

"Mr. Benraymond, do you think they will catch Sam?" asked Wilma, with tremulous lips.

"My child, I cannot say—I hope not."

"They'll have a lively time if they do, and don't you neglect it," put in Flea; "I tell you that boy's made of the best mettle."

The distance between Baby Sam and the foe, however, was greater than it appeared to those on the island, and was momentarily being widened. The Indian's canoes were loaded to their utmost capacity, and despite the fact of there being two paddles to each, the Boy Giant soon found that he had little to fear, for the time being, from his savage pursuers. And when he found he was safe enough, he took a kind of defiant delight in letting them gain upon him a little, then pulling out again.

In this way the chase continued for fully two miles, and as the shore of the mainland was now but a mile away, the fearless young mountaineer bent to his work and finally reached it half a mile in advance of the savages. Dragging his canoe onto the beach he turned and glided into the woods which, at this point, were quite dense. Not far from the shore he stopped, and, reaching into a hollow tree, drew therefrom his rifle and cartridge-belt that he had left there the night before when he swam to the rescue of Sabina Bandy and Sarah Marshall.

"Now, then," the fearless young giant mused, "I'm at home, and woe to them red-skins."

He advanced to the edge of the woods, and measuring the distance to the foremost savage canoe, adjusted the sight, and then resting the weapon against the side of a tree, took aim and fired.

The ball cut the water just in front of the boat.

"A little short," the youth mused, "but I'll be about right now," and again he brought the weapon to bear on the foe.

This time the deadly bullet went home, and a savage sunk lifeless in the boat. But before his friends could scarcely realize the terrible fact, for they were still four hundred yards from the shore, and a shot at that distance seemed a miracle, they saw another puff of smoke on shore, they heard the "spat" of a bullet, and another friend fell lifeless.

"Oh, you red fools!" exclaimed the young sharpshooter to himself, "I can do that all day. I've got the range now."

The two canoes ran alongside each other and came to a stand. Their occupants seemed to enter into a council, and while this was going on Baby Sam sent another ounce-ball of lead on its deadly mission, and as he saw a paddle in the hands of a red-skin thrown into the air, he burst into a peal of silent laughter.

"By smoke! I never had so much fun in my life," he soliloquized, "and I'd give a fist-hook if Old Kit Bandy was here to see how I slap—"

"By the horn of Joshua! I am here," said a voice, stepping from the opposite side of the tree, and turning, Baby Sam found his wish fully gratified, for Kit Bandy stood before him.

"Where did you come from, Kit?" the boy asked, apparently a little perplexed at being overheard thinking aloud.

"From right around that tree. I see'd you land, boy, get your gun, send a ranger over the water, then pop it o' them. You're a daisy, boy, on the shoot—highly as good as I used to be when my eyesight reached out like yours. But say, boy, where you bin?"

Baby Sam told him in a few brief words.

"Know anything of the girls yet?"

"Both are safe on the island with Benraymond."

"Gal-ory!" shouted the old detective; "did you rescue 'em, boy?"

"I helped."

"Say, do you know what it was that busted over on the lake about eleven o'clock to-day?"

"It was Benraymond blowing up his floating island with Scott Dresden, Donald Strahm and their minions aboard of it."

"You don't tell me!"

"Yes, and every mother's son of them was blown out of existence except Donald Strahm, and he lays blind, bleeding and dying on the island. Ichabod Flea sent me over here after you."

"Ichabod Flea? Then he's got around, eh?" and Bandy's eyes sparkled; "but say, do you know anything of my wife, Sabina?"

"Oh, get out, you old scoundrel!" said Baby Sam, with a laugh; "you and your old woman are frauds. That won't work any longer, Kit; Sabina gave the thing away."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Old Kit; "haydoogins of times have we fooled the sharpest o' folks that way. And so the gals are safe, and Dresden's dead, and Strahm's dying? Well, well, I told the boys to-day when I heard a roarin' in my left ear that I war goin' to hear some good news—it's a sign that never fails, boy, only when it misses. But say, them Ingins are comin' this way again. Excuse me for distarbin' your matinee."

A few more well-directed shots sent the surviving savages back into the lake, when Old Kit Bandy said:

"I'll run to camp, Sammy, tell the folks where I'm going and the good news from over the water. I'll be back in an hour."

So saying, the old detective took his departure, and Baby Sam remained to guard his canoe.

Meanwhile night was approaching, and those on the island were passing the moments in doubt and uncertainty.

Wilma paced the shore of the lake, ever watching out over the water through her tears for the coming of her boy lover—praying for his safety and safe return to her. About sunset she was joined by Mr. Benraymond who, after he had spoken some kind words of encouragement to her, said:

"Wilma, I hope you will pardon me for introducing the subject when you are feeling so bad, but I have just been talking with Detective Flea, and from him have I learned that this man, Strahm, now lying on this isle, has been endeavoring to kidnap you, and for that purpose came into this valley."

"Why me, any more than Sarah, Mr. Benraymond?" the maiden asked.

"You seem to be in his way more particularly than Sarah."

"What? I in Donald Strahm's way?"

"Yes; I see you are ignorant of your past life, child—your birth."

Wilma started and turned pale. Looking up into Benraymond's face she replied:

"Mr. Benraymond, there is nothing in my past life that I am ashamed of, and while I—"

The dip of a paddle fell upon her ears, and turning her head she saw a canoe with four occupants creeping over the water through the gathering twilight.

The two listened. They could hear voices, and suddenly Wilma exclaimed:

"Oh, I can hear the voice of Sam!"

"Halt!" who comes there?" the piping voice of Ichabod Flea suddenly called out.

"Oh, git away over there with your racket, Ichabod Flea, or, by the horn of Joshua, I'll salt you!" was the reply that came from the boat.

"Old Kit, by Jerusalem crickets!" declared the little detective.

The next minute the boat landed, and Baby Sam, Kit Bandy, Henry Rodman and Old Spokane Joe stepped upon the island amid glad shouts and cries of joy.

CHAPTER XV.

DONALD STRAHM'S CONFESSION.

For several moments there was general rejoicing on the island, and no one was happier than Wilma when she saw her father and lover before her alive and well; and Sarah Marshall seemed to share her joy with her, though there was one whose presence would have filled her young breast with supreme happiness, and that was Frank Rodman, who had remained ashore with Professor Dood, for the canoe would not carry them all.

Bandy and Rodman were introduced to Benraymond, the latter and Spokane Joe having met before, as the reader will well remember.

"They tell me," said Old Kit to Benraymond, "that you've been blowing up a lot of outlaws and red-skins to-day."

"Yes, we had to upon the principle that self-preservation is the first law of nature."

"A good law, a good law, sir," said the old detective, "but is that man Strahm still living?"

"He's barely alive."

"Is he conscious?"

"Yes; I will take you in where he lies."

Bandy followed the man into the grove where Strahm lay upon a blanket, breathing heavily.

"Fenwick," said Benraymond, "here is a man who wants to see you. He just arrived."

"Who is it?" asked the wounded man.

"Kit Bandy."

"Ah!" Strahm exclaimed, with a start, "Kit Bandy, the detective—Big Horn, the renegade. You played your cards well, Bandy, but death'll soon let me out, I hope. But what do you want to see me about, Bandy?"

"I've a warrant for your arrest."

"A warrant for me? for what?"

"Attempted murder."

"Attempted murder? of whom?" the miserable wretch gasped.

"Mrs. Ann Kirby."

"My God! is she not dead?"

"No, your bullet failed to do its work, and she lives."

"Where is she now?"

"At Denver."

"I am glad to hear it—hear that she lives. I confess that I attempted to kill her, and the deed has haunted me more than all the rest of my sins."

"Then your sins are many?" observed Bandy.

"Most of my life has been one of constant wrong, and all have been directed against Warren Hanover."

"Otherwise Aaron Benraymond," added Kit.

"Yes."

Benraymond bit his lip and his brows contracted, but he said never a word.

"What reason had you for sinning against Hanover?" the old detective questioned.

"He took from me the woman I loved—that would have made me wealthy and independent and happy."

"You loved her more for her wealth than aught else, didn't you?"

"Perhaps I did, but, be that as it may, I lost her, and now have lost all—even my own life is soon to go."

"What are you in this country for, when your home is in England?"

"I was here in search of Warren Hanover's child."

"Do you know how that child came here?"

"Yes, yes, I know all, Bandy, and I know what you seek to know. I have no objection to tell you all, for I fear no punishment on earth, and if what I may confess will lead to the happiness of those I have wronged, my punishment in the great hereafter may be somewhat less. Give me a sup of water, will you?"

His request was granted, then Old Spokane Joe and Henry Rodman were sent for to hear the man's confession.

"In the first place," began Donald Strahm, or, more properly, Norton Fenwick, "after the death of Hanover's wife, her child stood between me and the fortune to which I'd been heir had Constance Hanover, who was my cousin, died childless. To get that child out of my way was the work I had before me, and when Warren went abroad to travel, I persuaded Mrs. Ann Kirby, who had charge of the child, to come to America. A few months afterward I came over also, and going to her, demanded the child and got it, telling her I was going to return to England with it. But instead of doing so I took the child West a long ways and left it with a settler and his wife, and—"

"What was the settler's name?" interposed Old Kit.

"Jack Prunty. Well, it seems Mrs. Kirby mistrusted me, and, disguised in male attire, followed me to Omaha, where we both took rooms. In the morning she called me into her room and upbraided me for what I'd done, when I drew my revolver and shot her, left the weapon at her side and went back to my own room unobserved, but in a few minutes after took my departure East. The next day I read of the suicide of a stranger named Bates—the name under which she registered—at the Cozzens House in Omaha, and went on my way rejoicing. At that time I had a friend living in the West who'd been my college chum in England, but having killed a man in a quarrel escaped to America and assumed the name of Scott Dresden. Being a wild, wayward fellow, he soon became associated with bad men and not only became an outlaw but an outlaw leader. I met him by appointment at Omaha. To him I confided the secret of the child and engaged him to steal it away from Prunty and destroy it or carry it to some remote Indian village so that it would be lost sight of entirely. But before he could accom-

plish this Jack Prunty had pulled up stakes and with others started on further west. Determined to carry out his promise, Scott led a band of Indians and outlaws down upon the emigrant train, determined to kill and capture all. Most all were killed, and among the number were several small children, and Scott never dreamed but that Prunty and the child had fallen. I happened, however, that several years went by before the fortune for which I was planning went into the hands of the court to be settled on the next nearest of kin. I had not a doubt but that it would be turned over to me, but to my surprise some one filed a caveat asking the court to withhold a settlement of the estate on me, for the reason that he believed the child of Constance Hanover was still living in America, and could be produced. The decision of the court was that five years would be given to hunt up the child of Constance Hanover, and if she could not be found in that time, the presumption of the court would be that she—the child—was dead.

"I could not imagine how such an impression got out unless Scott Dresden had played a double game, and as my fortune depended on the child Irene never being found, I started at once for America and found Scott in Sitting Bull's camp. I told him of the impression that the child was still alive. He told me then that a Mrs. Phebe Connors, who'd been taken captive at the time of the massacre, had told him that it was her belief that Jack Prunty and the child did escape on horseback, but that he did not believe her story. I made up my mind then that it was through that same Phebe Connors that the idea got out of the child being alive, and I presume now Mrs. Kirby must have met her also."

"That's it, exactly," said Old Kit; "but pardon my interruption."

"Having some four years yet to wait before I could inherit the fortune, I resolved to put in the time hunting for the child. I did not expect to know her, for she was, if living, some fourteen years of age. But I hoped to learn through the settlers enough of her to make her identity certain. Scott Dresden volunteered to assist me, and for three years we have been at work searching among the settlements of the West, and about three months ago I was in the Gallatin valley and there met a young girl whom I knew at sight must be Irene Hanover from her wonderful resemblance to her dead mother. I felt so well satisfied of this that I began to lay plans to get her into my power. I kept a spy in the settlement all the while, and through him I learned of the proposed tour of four young people under Baby Sam through the Yellowstone Park. I learned all the details of their trip even to their visit to Mary's Lake, and it was there that I had arranged to get the girl into my power, and succeeded but was afterward thwarted through you, Kit Bandy, and the Boy Giant."

"Then that girl is Wilma Rodman," said the detective.

"Yes," answered Fenwick.

"The jig's up with us, Henry," said Old Spokane, in a whisper to Rodman.

"Go on, Fenwick," said Kit.

"Well, we," the man continued, "that is, Dresden's followers and a number of Indians, encamped over in the hills, and during a ramble one day I stumbled into the camp of one Professor Dood, and there I met, to my astonishment, Jack Prunty going under the name of Spokane Joe. I did not appear to recognize him, nor did he recognize me, but we met again that evening and then I made myself known and demanded of him the whereabouts of the child. He refused to tell. I called my friends, determined to take him a prisoner and extort from him the truth, although I was more certain now than ever that Wilma Rodman was the girl Irene. But the man resisted and a fight ensued, and just as he was overpowered a stranger came to his rescue sword in hand and we were forced to flee without the hunter. That stranger, I recognized as the object of my vengeance, Warren Hanover."

"And that's you, Aaron Benraymond," said Kit.

Benraymond nodded his head.

"Then he is Wilma's father, Henry," again whispered Spokane.

"And Wilma Rodman then is your child!" the old detective again observed.

"She must be! she must be!" the recluse replied with the greatest emotion; "I have thought so, ever since I met her."

"How is it, Spokane Joe? it's your time to speak now," said Bandy.

"Wal, there's no dodgin' the question, though to lose the gal from the Gallatin," replied Old Spokane, with a sadness in his voice, "will be to take all the sunshine outen my heart—outen the heart of Henry Rodman—outen all our hearts. Wilma Rodman is the gal that that man left with me and my wife, and I'm Jack Prunty. After the massacre where my wife was killed and from which I escaped as Mrs. Connors predicted, I was left in an awful shape with the little gal baby on my hands; but I could no more think o' givin' her away to some one and goin' off where I couldn't see her, than I could think of flyin'. So I took her to the Gallatin and placed her in care of Henry Rodman and his good wife. I did not like the looks of the man that first left her with us, and after I'd learned to love her as I loved my own soul, it was arranged that she be called Wilma Rodman, and as I was not known in the Gallatin valley, I give my own name as Spokane Joe, the hunter. I did this so the man could never find us out by our names. While Mr. Rodman has raised her to a lovely young lady, I have always remained near where I could see her, and look upon her as my child."

"Just so," said Old Kit, rubbing his hands in a delighted manner, "this lets you out, Spokane; now,

Mr. Rodman, what have you to offer on the subject?"

"Nothing more, Kit, than to say that what Spokane has told you is true," the settler answered.

"Well, the case is a pretty clear one now," the old detective said, "but does Wilma know the facts connected with her eventful life?"

"Yes," answered Rodman, "all except the mystery of her birth and babyhood previous to the day she was left at Jack Prunty's, which was unknown to all of us up to this hour."

"Well, the ends of justice have been served all around, and I'll get several thousand pounds sterling out of the job," said Old Kit, "but I wonder how that poor little gal will take the news?"

"She will receive it," said Henry Rodman, "with a feeling of joy and relief, for the only trouble that has ever weighed upon her mind of late years was through a kind of presentiment that she was the child of a villain—ay, a murderer. Mr. Benraymond—Warren Hanover, I congratulate you, sir, upon being the father of so bright and lovely a daughter. But as Old Spokane has said, to take her away from among us will be to throw a shadow over our hearts—over all the settlement—that will remain so long as memory lasts."

"I thank you, Rodman," replied Benraymond, "for the compliment you pay me; and while it is true that I have lived, for seventeen years, the saddest and loneliest of lives—ever thinking of my dead wife and lost child I will not make Wilma unhappy by taking her away from her lifelong friends. Yea, if you think best, my friends, she need never know that I am her father, and I will go my way and bear my burden until life has ended with patience and fortitude."

"Benraymond," said Rodman, half-choked with emotion, "there is no need of your suffering longer. For your child to know you can but make her happy, and you happy, and God knows all the rest of us will be happy."

"Then Wilma shall be made happy—her every wish gratified!" said the great-hearted man.

Leaving Ichabod Flea to watch by the side of Donald Strahm, the four men proceeded to where Baby Sam and the maidens were seated.

"Wilma," said Mr. Rodman.

"Yes, father," and the girl arose and came up to where he stood.

"My child," the settler went on, "you remember what Spokane and I have told you of your past life? of your being left when a little babe with Jack Prunty and his wife?"

"To be sure, father, I remember it," replied Wilma.

"That dying man has made a revelation."

"What, father? what was it?" the maiden exclaimed, half in dread of something terrible.

"He is the man, so he and Spokane both say, that left you with Prunty and his wife."

"What! that man my father?" the girl shrieked, starting back with a look of distress upon her face.

"No, Wilma," replied Rodman, "he is not your father, thank God, but this noble-looking man, Aaron Benraymond, or rather Warren Hanover, is your father."

Warren Hanover stood with his arms folded across his breast, his eyes fixed upon Wilma with a fond, admiring gaze, his great heart beating wildly.

Wilma uttered a little cry and glanced wildly from Henry Rodman to Hanover, and then as her eyes met those of the recluse fixed upon her she gave a wild glad cry, and running to Hanover threw her arms about his neck and burst into tears.

"My father! my father!" she cried; "God has heard my prayers! Oh, my dear, strange father! I prayed that you might prove to be my father, when I lay helpless in your cabin!"

"And my dear girl, when I first looked upon your sweet face, the very image of your dead mother's, my yearning, hungering heart told me you were my child!" replied the happy father.

The reunion of father and daughter was a most affecting one, every witness of the event being moved to tears.

"Say, folks," and Ichabod Flea suddenly appeared from the grove, "by the Jerusalem crickets! Norton Fenwick's deader'n the mother o' Adam!"

"You don't say so?" exclaimed Old Kit.

"I do—he went off as easy as a turtle off a log."

"May the Lord have mercy on his soul," said Warren Hanover, serious.

"God's will be done," added Henry Rodman.

A week has passed, and we find those whom we have followed through the perils and wonders of Wonderland safely at home in the Gallatin valley.

Warren Hanover became the guest of Henry Rodman, while Old Kit Bandy and Ichabod Flea pushed on to Denver to report the success of their long hunt to Matthew Hoopel and Mrs. Meggs.

Hanover was not long in deciding his future course, and that was to remain in the Gallatin valley—not only as a matter of choice, but that his daughter might be near those with whom she had grown to womanhood, and those whom she loved. He, however, made a trip to England, accompanied by Wilma, and her old nurse, Mrs. Ann Kirby; but as soon as Wilma's right had been established to her inheritance, all returned and took up their abode in the lovely valley where they are living in the enjoyment of a peaceful and happy life.

Baby Sam will probably always be known by that name among those who have known him from boyhood; but, be that as it may, there will never be a braver, nobler youth in all the land—none more worthy of a beautiful woman's love than he of Wilma's.

THE END.

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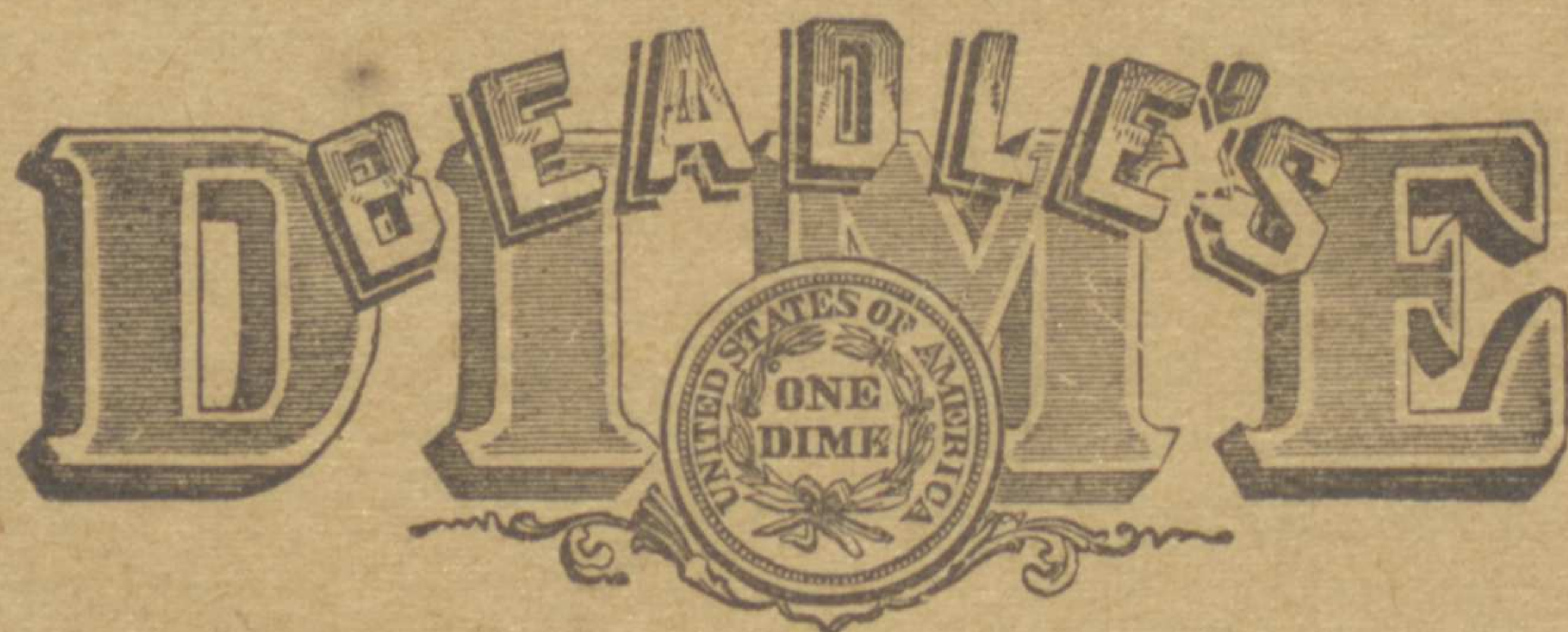


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